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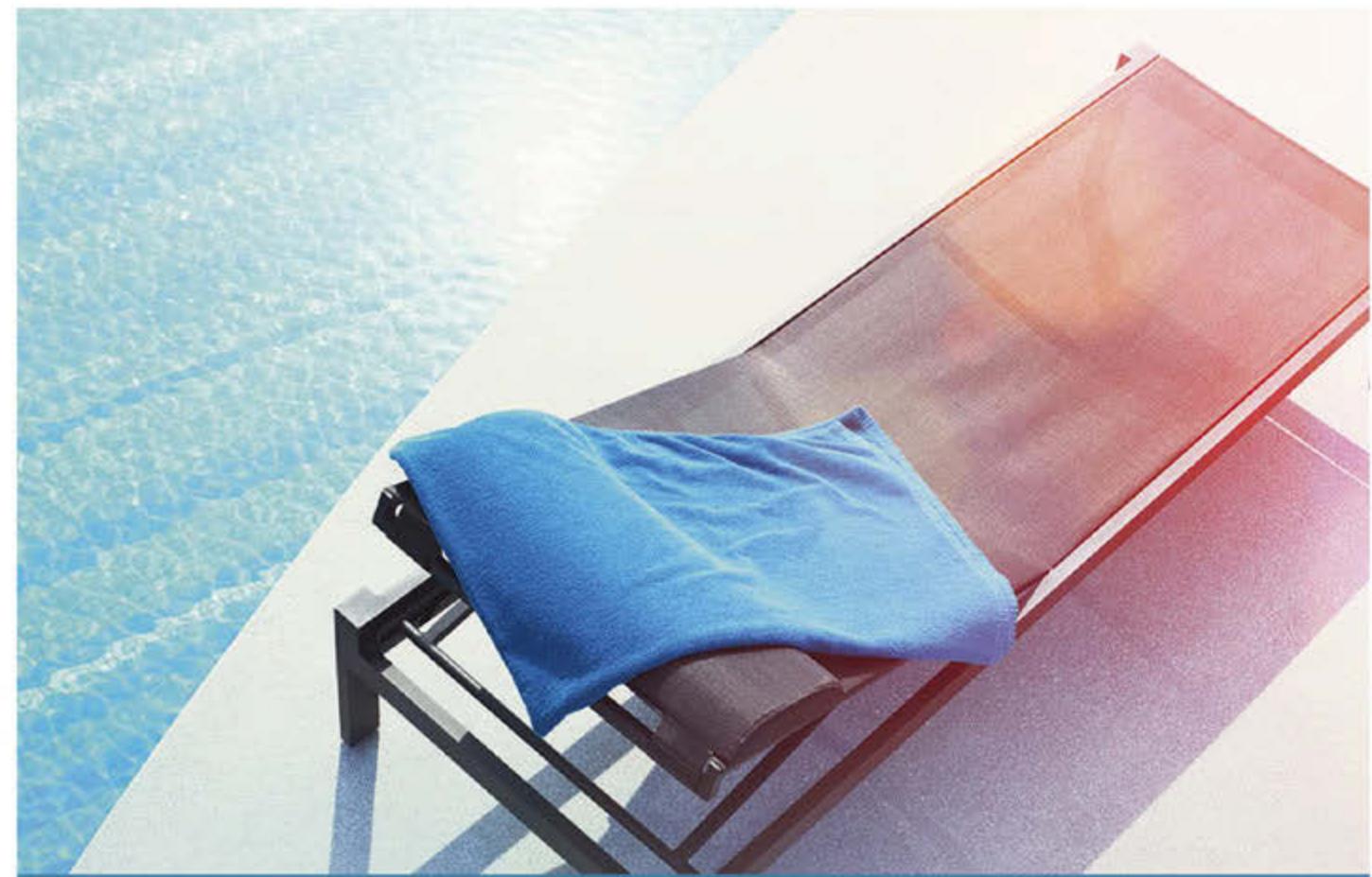


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A wave of South American immigrants, Southern revivalists, superstar chefs and gastro-entrepreneurs has turned Miami into America's most sizzling food scene. BY ANYA VON BREMSEN. PHOTOGRAPHED BY MATHIEU SALVAING

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High style comes to the mighty Mekong with the launch of the Aqua Mekong. Photographed by Aaron Joel Santos.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF TOPAS ECOLodge; FRANCISCO GUERRERO; ANDREA WYNER; GRANT HARDER; GARY FRIEDLAND



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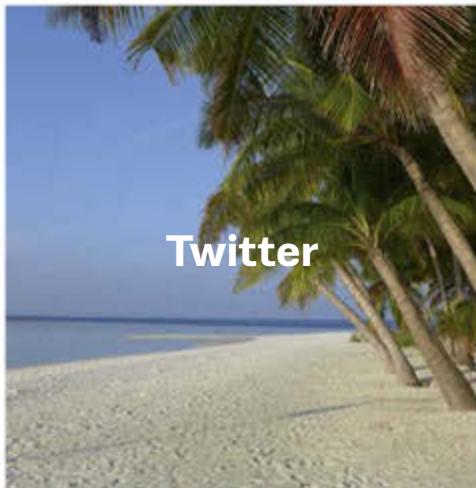
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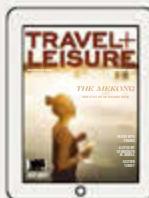


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This Month's Top Lists

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in Bali

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Christopher Kucway

THOUGH A DRIVING FORCE BEHIND MANY OF our travels is to explore entirely new horizons, even the most peripatetic of us longs to return to a few favorites as well. And many in this region—particularly the expats among us—can identify with the idea of loving a place so much that they end up moving there. Contributors Robyn Eckhardt and David Hagerman, who previously have lived in Chengdu and Kuala Lumpur, among other places, elucidate this

notion in “My Penang” (page 70). Call it long-form travel if you will. Like any great journey, this American couple’s story isn’t all unforgettable sunsets and perfect meals, but it does include a diverse cast of characters, mouthwatering flavors, and new experiences every day—as well as the adventure of renovating a shophouse.

I, for one, have been trying to get them to lend me the place when they’re on one of their many journeys abroad. If you’re not lucky enough to have a friend living in an enviable locale, take a look at “The New World of Vacation Rentals” (page 57). This growing sector is not aimed only at families anymore; style-bound urban wanderers and five-star disciples are also leasing in lieu of hotels.

Elsewhere in this issue, we head off on a much-anticipated cruise up the Mekong (“Taking the Waters,” page 80), from Vietnam’s delta to Phnom Penh, where voyagers with more time can continue on to Siem Reap. Aside from the complex history along this waterway, the *Aqua Mekong* journey represents another growing trend in Asia: river cruising.

While Eckhardt and Hagerman found their home away from home in Penang, I’ve done the same with an octogenarian house in Vancouver. This month’s Decoder (page 112) uncovers the best of that beautiful city and makes me miss my adopted home and neighborhood even more. After all, I haven’t been there in two weeks!



The sea wall around Stanley Park, in Vancouver.

The T+L Code While on assignment, *Travel+Leisure* editors and contributors travel incognito whenever possible. They also generally do not accept free travel or take press trips; we will clearly identify any instances in which we’ve made an exception to this policy.



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Robyn Eckhardt

—
Writer

["My Penang," page 70](#)

Expat lessons This is my 20th year living outside the U.S., all in Asia. I've learned that no place in the world is perfect, and that no matter how long I

live somewhere, I'll always be an outsider. (That's not always a bad thing.)

Favorite getaway on Penang Pulau Tikus market, outside of George Town. I'm all about food, and I cook every day, so for me being in a great market is an hour of heaven. This one is perfect:

compact, lively, with the freshest ingredients, peopled with lots of vendors selling prepared foods to take home and surrounded by *kopitiam* with excellent hawker fare. **Where next?** I would move to Taipei in a heartbeat but residency visas are problematic for freelancers. So I'm still looking...

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Matthieu Salvaing

—
Photographer

["Eating the New Miami,"
page 104](#)

Memorable Miami meal

The ceviche at La Mar by Gastón Acurio, in the Mandarin Oriental, Miami, was excellent and the atmosphere was relaxing, with great water views. **Food photography**

101 You must remember that food is not a mere object but is to be enjoyed. **Hidden gems?** Miami's Little Havana section. Don't miss the *café cubano* at Versailles

Bakery. **Dream food assignment** *Washoku*, a type of traditional Japanese cuisine, fascinates me. I'd love to shoot that classic form of cooking in Kyoto, which has many fine chefs.



Anya von Bremzen

—
Writer

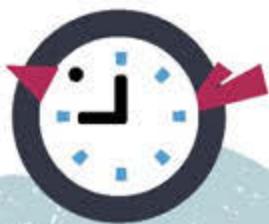
["Eating the New Miami,"
page 104](#)

Miami's dish of the moment *Crudo*, sashimi...everything from the raw bar that swims. **You could spend the rest of your life eating...** The soupy, homely

Catalan rices at Niu Kitchen and chocolate babka from Zak the Baker.

What do you wish Miami had more of? Local vegetables and fruit on menus.

On your next trip I'll visit the River Seafood & Oyster Bar's new location and Michelle Bernstein's Seagrape at the Thompson Miami Beach.



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Inbox

Whoa, there are a lot of beautiful corners in Indonesia. Now that I have the wild north of Bali ["Transcendence," July 2014] to add to my list, I don't know how I'm possibly going to see them all.

—Pieter Dieleman, NETHERLANDS



Andaman Escape

The Kam Archipelago ["Hidden in Plain Sight," August 2014] looks so beautiful and tempting—especially if you love the sea.

—Rosemary Martis
INDIA

Wow! Sign me up for a trip to those Thai islands! And I love the tent, too.

—Remell Robinson
INDIANA

Repeat Eats

I visited Old China Café twice on a recent visit to Kuala Lumpur ["Decoder," July 2014]. Their food is amazing.

—Jess Bartholomew
BRISBANE

Stunning Sinosphere

Hangzhou ["China Dreams," March 2014] is so beautiful. I love the scenery.

—Yi Li

Indochina Cruising

We did this trip through Bai Tu Long ["The Bay Less Traveled," August 2014] three years ago. Perfect!

—Paula Morgan
SYDNEY

Oh, how I'd love to see the karsts and the waters and people in this part of Halong Bay. Must do.

—Julie Lenard

Culture Crazy

I have two words for your UNESCO Last Look ["Asian Heritage," August 2014]: History personified.

—Ankit Karki

Imagination Isle

Doesn't Funtasy Island ["Green Is Good, July 2014] sound fantastic? Plus it's eco to boot! I'm bringing my friends there when we go to Singapore.

—Loh Yi Xin

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FEATURES EDITORS	Merritt Gurley (on leave) Jeninne Lee-St. John Diana Hubbell
DESIGNERS	Chotika Sopitarchasak Autchara Panphai
ASSISTANT EDITOR	Monsicha Hoonsuan

REGULAR CONTRIBUTORS / PHOTOGRAPHERS

Cedric Arnold, Jeff Chu, Helen Dalley, Robyn Eckhardt, Philipp Engelhorn, David Hagerman, Lauryn Ishak, Mark Lean, Melanie Lee, Naomi Lindt, Brent T. Madison, Ian Lloyd Neubauer, Aaron Joel Santos, Adam Skolnick, Darren Soh, Stephanie Zubiri

CHAIRMAN	J.S. Uberoi
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PRODUCTION	Supalak Krewsasaen
GROUP CIRCULATION MANAGER	Porames Sirivejabandhu
CIRCULATION ASSISTANT	Yupadee Saebea

TRAVEL + LEISURE (USA)

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SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT / PUBLISHING DIRECTOR	Steven DeLuca
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TIME INC. INTERNATIONAL LICENSING & DEVELOPMENT (syndication@timeinc.com)

VICE PRESIDENT	Jim Jacovides
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CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER	Joseph Ripp
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Radar

News. Finds. Opinions. Obsessions.

ON THE MAP

WILLIAMSBURGOS

Manila's Burgos district sheds its gritty reputation and sprouts funky restaurants and bars, drumming up an artsy vibe that recalls, **Stephanie Zubiri** dares to say, Brooklyn. →



Urban whimsy
adorns MNL
Boutique Hostel.

1 MNL Boutique Hostel

This centrally located hostel offers clean rooms, happy colors, bright murals, free Wi-Fi, book exchanges and a “cool-cierge” service for the best insider tips and tourist information. *4688 B. Valdez St. corner Santiago Street; mnlboutiquehostel.com; doubles from P1,400.*



2 Beni's Falafel

At this three-table hole-in-the-wall is the best falafel and baba ghanoush in town. That is if you can find it! Seasoned clients call in advance, get their food to go—and know to ask for extra fried eggplant in their sandwiches. *4364 B. Valdez St.; 63-906/349-1300; falafel for two P270.*



3 Pink Panda

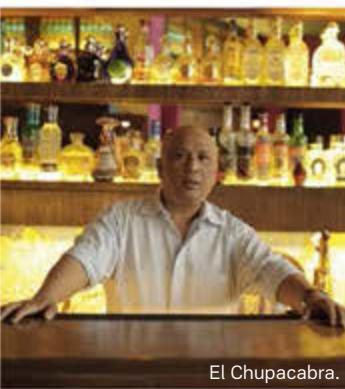
This Southeast Asian diner with quirky décor and great cocktails serves cheeky versions of regional faves such as “Thai Beef and Daughter-in-Law’s Eggs” or the deep-fried tilapia dish called “We Fried Nemo.” *GF Y2 Residence Hotel, 4687 Santiago St.; 63-917/839-3790; cocktails and sharing plates for two P1,300.*



4 Two Chic Manila

This clothing line has the kind of breezy bohemian looks every woman wants. Think graphic tunics and evening rompers with hand-beaded detailing. *6239 Mañalac St., Poblacion, Makati; 63-2/899-2435; twochic.com.ph.*

shots of their house *rhum arrangé* while a cigarette dangles oh-so-precariously from his mouth. *Bel-Air Soho Bldg., Polaris Street corner Badajos Street, Bel-Air; lecafecurieux.com; Pastis for two P170.*



5 Café Curieux

Run and overrun by Gallic expats, it's your typical *bar du coin*: Pastis, Edith Piaf and the scruffy Frenchie barman serving you free

Kish
A haven for the beautiful and luxe, curated by globally acclaimed designer Ito Kish. There's furniture including the award-winning Gregoria chair of his own design, modern Kiwi sky planters, and brass table accessories from India. *233 Nicanor Garcia St., Bel-Air; kish.ph.*

7 Heima

This “Live happy, beyond ordinary” lifestyle and design store embraces all things cheery. *LRI Design Plaza, 210 Nicanor Garcia, Bel-Air II; heimastore.com.* +

ARRIBA ARRIBA!

A Latino sub-culture—

first started by the Tex-Mex and margarita joint **8 Chihuahua** (*chihuahuamexgrill.com; chihuaritas for two P390*)—is spicing up the town with lively new additions. Head to **9 El Chupacabra** (5782

Felipe St., Bel-Air; 63-2/895-1919; fb.com/elchupacabra; meal for two P280) for some street tacos and cheap beer.

Pop over to **10 Señor Pollo** (5767 Ebro St., Poblacion; 63-2/831-6945; *fb.com/señorpollo ph*; meal for two P370) to wipe out a plate of roast chicken with *chimichurri*, spicy rice and Latin American slaw. End your night with tequila shots from **11 A'Toda**

Madre's (63-998/999-1521; *atodamadre.com.ph*; shots for two P500) vast collection of *añejos* and *reposados* before zigzagging your way to Chihuahua, where it all began, for their famous chihuaritas and Salsa Project Saturday party.





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Ardhanarishvara, the androgynous Shiva representing the primordial Prakruti and Purusha symbolizing the union of Shiva and Shakti in three distinct varieties is found in the temples of Odisha.

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VIVA VIENTIANE!

Vannaphone Sitthirath is revolutionizing the Laos movie industry. Follow the cofounder of Laos New Wave Cinema on a tour of her hometown.

Stay There is more boutique accommodation than ever in Vientiane. The **Mandala Boutique Hotel** (mandalahotel.asia; *doubles from US\$80*), with its location set apart from the city center, is quiet and calm. Closer to the city's action, **Salana Boutique**

(salanaboutique.com; *doubles from US\$140*) is kitted out in local Lao wood for a real luxe vibe. When I'm in the mood for a staycation I usually book a suite at the **Green Park Boutique Hotel** (*248 Khouvieng Rd., Ban Nongchanch; 856-21/264-097; greenparkvientiane.com; doubles from US\$165*) because I like the classic Lao architecture.

Eat Le **Nadao Restaurant** (*856-21/213-174*), a 10-minute walk from the Mandala Boutique Hotel, serves a great French dinner. **Muzaike Restaurant** (*Rue Manthatoulath, Ban Xieng Ngeun*) is small but very special. My favorite dishes are the spicy salmon, skirt steak, and spicy stir-fried spaghetti with shrimp roe.

Drink The seating area at **Parisien Café** (*off Rue Dongpayna*) is huge and its exposed brick walls give off a warm, cozy feeling. Sunset cocktails at **L'Atmosphere** (facebook.com/latmosphere; *Rue Simeuang; 856-20/7715-8813*) come with a calming view of the Mekong River.

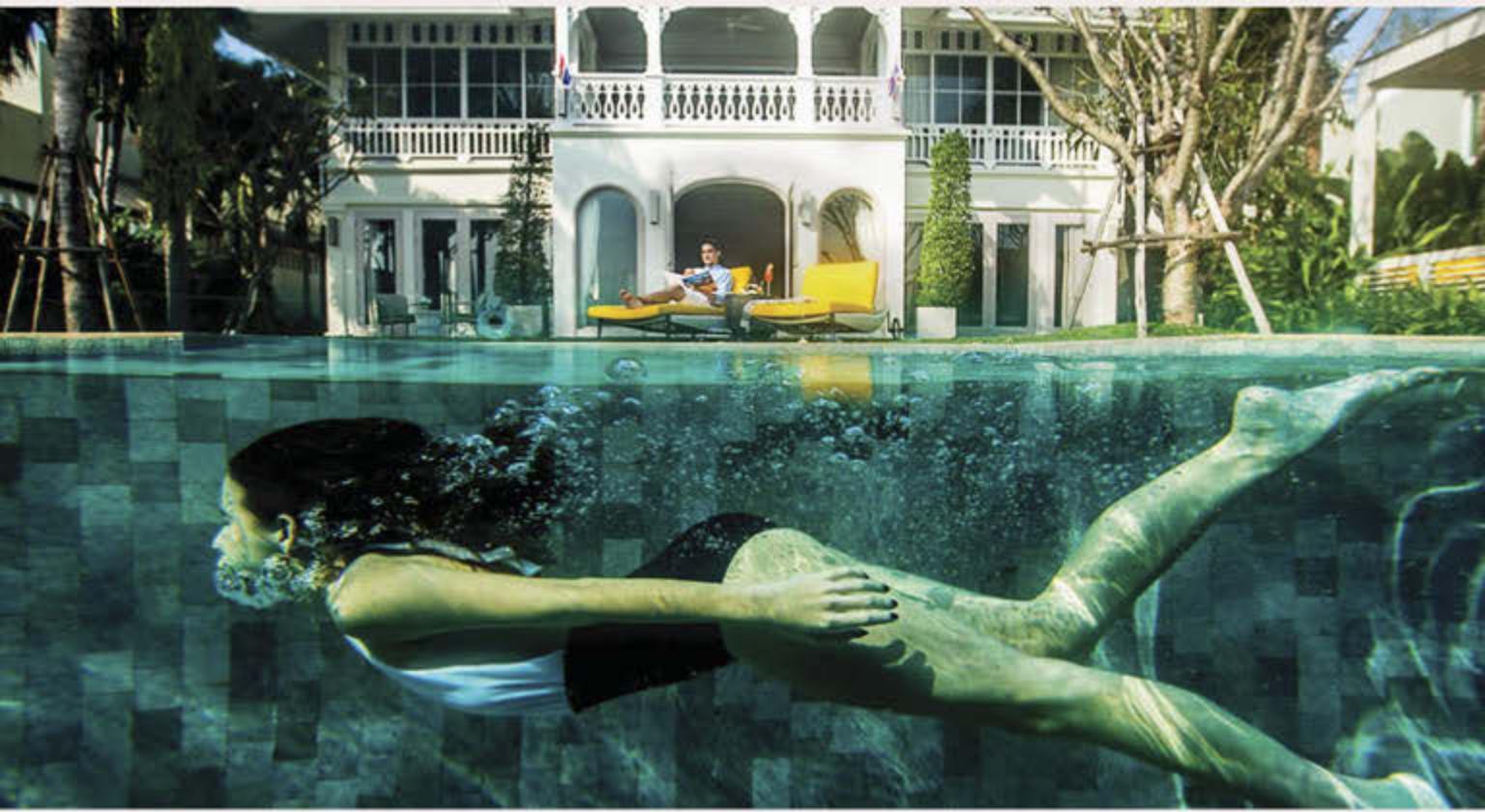
Shop Browse the history books and old paperbacks in **Monument Books** (monumentbooks.com). + Go to Carol Cassidy's **Lao Textiles** (laotextiles.com) for handwoven silk scarves; to **T'Shop Lai Gallery** (*856-21/223-178*) for local art and photography; and to **Lao Coco** (laococo.com) for handcrafted furniture.

Do Support the arts. Duck into one of the rotating exhibitions at **M Gallery** (*133 Rue Samsenthai, Ban Anou; 856-21/214-765*) or **I:Cat Gallery** (facebook.com/icatgallery). Come in March for the **Vientianale International Film Festival** (*March 12-15; vientianale.org*) where **Lao New Wave Cinema's** (laonewwavecinema.com) upcoming film *Vientiane in Love* will be showing. + Take a bike tour of the city. **Vientiane ByCycle** (vientianebycycle.com; *seven-hour tour K550 per person*) has daytrips that will give you a tough workout while you see everything from famous temples to quiet villages. —DAVID NGO



Clockwise from top left: Vannaphone Sitthirath; handwoven silk shawl from Lao Textiles; organic soap from T'Shop Lai Gallery; Green Park Boutique Hotel; Parisien Café; outdoor screening at Vientianale International Film Festival.

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SHOP

THE STYLE GUIDE

Trendy Singaporeans will no longer have to jet to Tokyo or Hong Kong to stock up on envy-inducing design objects. After a brief but popular pop-up venture back in 2013, *Monocle* has decided to permanently grace the Lion City with its more-stylish-than-you presence. Tucked away in a 1950's colonial townhouse in the quiet Chip Bee Gardens neighborhood, The Monocle Shop offers a closely curated selection of products, from Porter bags and gold-embossed Delfonics card holders, to garments by Comme des Garçons and Monocle Voyage, the brand's own menswear label, all in—of course—an impeccably minimalist space decked out in local furnishings. Join the throngs of local hipsters and flip through *The Forecast*, the company's newly launched annual tome, over a cup of Allpress coffee at the adjacent café. 74 Jln. Kelabu Asap, Singapore; monocle.com/shop. —DIANA HUBBELL

The Monocle Shop.

Mumbai-based curator

Diana Campbell Betancourt travels the world in search of promising new artists. Now she's one of 14 advisors helping to assemble the roster for the New Museum Triennial, which opens on February 25 in New York City (newmuseum.org). We asked her about the experience.

How did you get involved with the Triennial?

Travel is at the heart of my practice—I'm not an armchair curator. I'd done a lot of studio visits in India, Pakistan and Burma for the Dhaka Art Summit. One of the Triennial's main curators liked my work, and then the invitation came.

Which artists are you most excited about?

Zar Min Htike is a Burmese painter who

was in jail for seven years and who used to imagine ghosts were in there with him. He does these crazy surrealist works using discarded paints. I also met Shreyas Karle in Bombay in 2010. His *Cinema City* installation—which comments on the discord between urban life in India and its depiction in Bollywood—will be on display at the Triennial.

What part of the world are you interested in next?

I've been seeing a lot of great artists from Mexico. Pedro Reyes takes guns that were used for drug warfare in Juárez and turns them into musical instruments. They're beautiful pieces, but bringing them into India is difficult, as you can imagine.

—MICHAEL SNYDER

TYPOLOGY

BAD ACTORS

Airport vigilantes have lately been calling out rude conduct on social media—from bare feet and nose-picking (#PassengerShaming) to too-big bags (#CarryonShame). But there's more boorish behavior in search of a hashtag. Travel vulgarians, we're talking to you.



#PosePoseur

Eiffel Tower, Angkor Wat, Machu Picchu: do you have to do a tree pose in front of every famous monument you see?

#DeplaneDBag

Have some respect for the natural order when exiting a plane. We're going to spot you waiting at baggage claim anyway.

#ChaiseChase

To the hotel guest who rises before dawn to claim multiple lounges at the pool: you're on vacation! Sleep in!

#FluidFlouter

Yes, the carry-on rules for liquids apply to you—and the massive bottle of sunblock you apparently can't live without.

#PowerHungry

Go ahead, please dominate the gate charging station with your phone, tablet, e-reader and laptop.

DEBUT

SAIGON SUDS

Now you can slap that Made in Vietnam label on the region's hottest drink—craft beer.



Violette brewing a fresh batch.

What do you get when you cross the French godfather of yeast fermentation with a cornucopia of Indochinese herbs and flavors? Vietnam's first American-style microbrewery, **Pasteur Street Brewing Company**, which soft-opened last month. Since Violette left his position as head brewer at popular Upslope Brewing Company, in Boulder, Colorado, and moved to Saigon with his marketing-savvy girlfriend, Bethany Lovato, he joined forces with John Reid, an American expat who had been living in Vietnam for six years. In the past six months, the trio has scoured the country for ingredients and inspiration.

It's not like they were entering an untapped, if you will, market. Vietnamese salarymen love their curbside icy brews, and a recent wave of more upscale beer halls has brought drinkers in from the street—and given women a license to imbibe. But the options remained limited to watery, mass-produced lagers and the occasional pricey import. Pasteur Street, which offers tastings in a mellow, blonde-wood space, "wants to make our beers unique to our region," Lovato says, pointing to their initial few varietals as evidence. Their Vietnamese Wit is brewed with



A microbrew tasting.

basil, lemongrass, ginger, black pepper and lemon peel from local markets; the Civet Coffee Brown uses Kopi Luwak coffee from a small farm in the highlands of Dalat.

Violette is sticking to small batches for now, but his ambitions are big: he hopes to export around the world so that, perhaps, someday soon the folks back in Boulder may be sipping a tall, frosty one from Saigon. In the meantime, he's getting the best of two different worlds. "While sourcing ingredients," Lovato says, "we have been able to see some very beautiful parts of Vietnam." And with results this refreshing, we wish them many happy returns. *144 Pasteur, Dist. 1, Saigon; 84-90/551-4782; pasteurstreet.com.* —D.H.



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Black waters, high waves, deadly winds: no force of nature will deter **Ian Lloyd Neubauer** on his kayaking expedition through Tasmania's breathtaking wilderness. →

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The Pool
Kamuela Villas & Suites Sanur - Bali



The Bedroom
Kamuela Villas - Seminyak

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Opening Soon:

Royal Kamuela Senggigi - Lombok

"If you listen hard enough you can hear the earth rotating," says Dan Broun, a filmmaker and wilderness photographer from Hobart. This week, he is also my paddling partner through one of the most beautiful, unusual and untraveled waterways on earth. The Port Davey Marine Reserve is an estuary so isolated by the extremes of geography and weather that it remains inaccessible for almost eight months of the year. Here in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, even the birds are few and far between.

This vast, rugged, uninhabited, 1.5-million-hectare arena of snow-capped mountains, wild rivers, rainforests, marshlands and moors in the southwest corner of Australia's largest island is a nearly singular place. It is one of only two locations in the world (the other is Mount Tai, in Shandong, China) that meets seven out of UNESCO's 10 criteria for World Heritage listing—almost overkill since only one is required to join the club. From April, the strong westerly trades known as the Roaring Forties pummel Tasmania's southwest with cyclonic-force winds and lashing rains, giving no respite until the Austral summer arrives in December.

When sunlight finally pierces the clouds, Port Davey welcomes two very exclusive groups of visitors: yachters brave enough to tackle the 115-nautical-

mile journey from the capital Hobart through waves consistently rated as the largest on earth; and the 100-odd travelers fortunate enough to secure placement on weeklong expeditions with Hobart-based ecotourism operator Roaring 40°s Kayaking. I made the cut in the latter crowd, and I'm about to join the narrow ranks of explorers who have embarked on this remote seafaring sojourn.

"How was the taxi ride in?" asks expedition leader Reg Grundy of the knuckle-clenching flight in a 10-seater all-weather aircraft that hugs the jagged soaring sea cliffs of Tasmania's south coast before diving to land on a short gravel airstrip at the former tin-mining hamlet of Melaleuca. A salt-of-the-earth Bear Grylls-character with a thick Aussie drawl who spends the off-season waterfall kayaking in Far North Queensland and mountain-biking in the Middle East, Grundy makes light of everything—except safety. "I won't sugarcoat it," he says. "This is an expedition on the edge of the world. There is nothing here. If the weather turns, we need to be confident enough to survive in the wilderness with our guests in a long-term situation."

It sounds more ominous than I thought I'd signed up for. But then, from the airstrip, Grundy and I carry our duffel bags through a placid field sewn with blooming wildflowers to

the bank of a creek where a fleet of two-person sea kayaks loaded with provisions awaits. After donning an ensemble of wind- and waterproof gear, we settle into our kayaks.

The Bathurst Channel that links Melaleuca to Port Davey is inky black in the center but tea-colored along the banks, stained by tannins created by the constant confluence of fresh and saltwater. Beneath its surface lies an even more beguiling diversion—an ecosystem devoid of light where scuba divers with powerful torches have discovered sea fans, soft coral, biscuit starfish, orange sea urchins, tube worms and hundreds of other kinds of invertebrates that have evolved over the eons in place of plants and fish. The low light and nutrient levels affect the entire length of the food chain; there are few birds here and the place is eerily quiet.

We spend the first night in the wilderness at Forest Lagoon, a standing camp with a dozen bungalows and an alfresco dining room, set some six kilometers downriver from Melaleuca. The grub here is surprisingly good—lamb and couscous, creamy pesto gnocchi, fat salad sandwiches, muesli with fresh fruit and yogurt—and it doesn't falter on the successive evenings we spend camping in simple but comfortable tents pitched on grasslands or creamy white beaches. Time loses all meaning



From left: Powering through the 112 kilometers; alfresco dining at Forest Lagoon.

as we paddle further downstream, passing celery-top islands crowded with tea trees and buttongrass-clad hills that glow copper in the afternoon light. Behind them in every direction roll the blue-gray mountains of Southwest National Park, their dark eucalypt-lined gullies folds in the hide of a sleeping giant.

Port Davey may be empty today but it's rich with human history. During our 112-kilometer kayaking journey, we visit the site of a former whaling station at Bramble Cove, where we find parts of irregularly shaped rum bottles hand-blown in the early 19th century. We visit the grave of Critchley Parker Junior, a Melbourne businessman who got lost and died of exposure in the 1940's while surveying land for a fruitless plot to establish a homeland for European Jews. We also visit an Aboriginal cave where archeologists have found stone artifacts and evidence of shellfish exploitation dating back 30,000 years.

Onward we row until we breach the mouth of Bathurst Channel and face the awesome might of the Southern Ocean, where four-meter-high waves heavily test our mettle. "When you round the bend of the last island," says Grundy, "and the swell jacks up and it's just you and the sea, you feel it in your stomach." That's not the only place I feel it—though the kayaks are well-weighted, my arms thrum with the effort even on still days; right about now I'm pushing my limits, but adrenaline is a perfect fuel. "It's a strange mix of terror and excitement," says Grundy's assistant Tory Stewart. Paired with the dramatic landscape, it makes for quite an elixir. Some two kilometers offshore at the Breaksea Islands, we explore sea caves, paddle-through arches and towering rock pinnacles as the restless waves roll and crash on a rocky, windswept coast. Paddle in hand, I am one with the elements even as I battle them. +

Roaring 40's Kayaking; 61-455/949-777; roaring40skayaking.com.au; seven-day expedition at Port Davey including flights from Hobart from A\$2,990; December to mid April only.



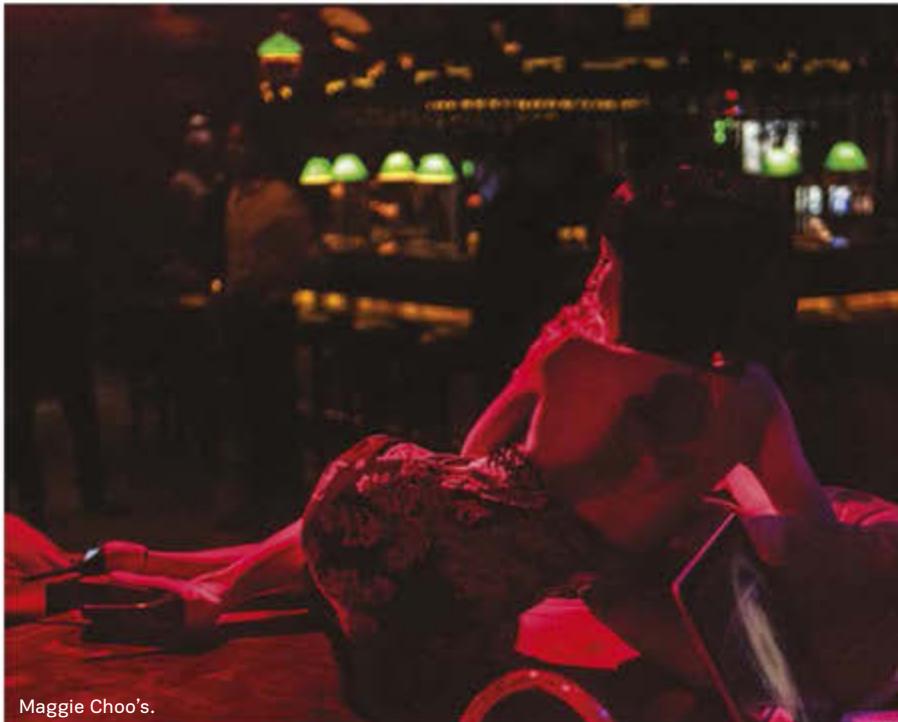
Above: Guides Reg Grundy and Tory Stewart cook up a culinary storm. Below: On some nights during the seven-day expedition, only the beach beckons as a camp site.



LOCFILE

INSIDERS' BANGKOK

Navigating this teeming megacity can be a dizzying affair. T+L tapped three locals to show us around town.



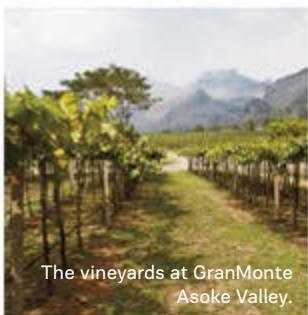
Maggie Choo's.



The Impresario

Sanya Souvanna Phouma
Managing partner at Maggie Choo's nightclub
Moved to Bangkok in 1997

LAST GREAT MEAL Some buddies and I went on a dining tour: five restaurants, lots of drinks, and everything from andouillette with whole grain mustard at **Maison Blanche** (maisonblanchebkk.com; dinner for two Bt1,800) to the nose-to-tail burger at **Vesper** (vesperbar.co; dinner for two Bt2,000). **AFTER DARK** By the river, I like **Jazz Happens** (jazzhappens.org), on Phra Athit. At **Maggie Choo's** (320 Silom Rd.), we started a highbrow gay cabaret Sunday—something Bangkok hasn't seen before. **PACKING TIP** Guys, yes, it's hot here, but bring a pair of **linen trousers**. You can't get into nice clubs in shorts. **BOUTIQUE HOTEL** **Cabochon** (cabochonhotel.com; doubles from Bt5,880) has Shanghainese sofas and an old-Orient feel.



The vineyards at GranMonte Asoke Valley.



The Curator

Myrtle Tibayrenc
Artistic director at the Toot Yung Art Center
Moved to Bangkok in 2006

UNDERRATED The amazing paintings and bronze Buddha statue at **Wat Suthat** in the Old City, a lesser-known temple that is just as beautiful as the eternally crowded Wat Pho. **CULTURE PICK** The **RMA Institute** (rmainstitute.net) has well-curated exhibitions and serves a nice brunch in the garden. Its Gastro 1/6 café does a perfect poached egg with asparagus and truffle oil. **WEEKEND GETAWAY** I usually go to Muak Lek, in the Saraburi province, to



Oskar.

The Pop Star

Debbie See
Recording artist
Born and raised in Bangkok

MY FRIDAY NIGHT I usually grab a cocktail on the two-story porch at **Oskar** (oskar-bistro.com; *drinks for two Bt420*), a lounge overlooking busy Sukhumvit Soi 11. **WEEKEND GETAWAY** Koh Samet, a 2½-hour drive and quick speedboat ride away. It is like a second home for a lot of people here. I stay at **Paradee** (samedresorts.com; *doubles from Bt18,500*), for its peaceful beach with beautiful villas and complete privacy. **IN-TOWN GUILTY PLEASURES** I admit I like the touristy area around Khao San Road! The fun restaurant **My Darling** (*Soi Rambuttri; dinner for two Bt400*) is great for people-watching. To evade the heat and chill out, I stop by the bar at **Buddy Hotel** (buddylodge.com) for a Guinness. **QUINTESSENTIAL BANGKOK SHOP** One of the first Thai brands to hit it big was **Greyhound** (greyhound.co.th), known for its chic, simple designs and high quality. I love the café—the spicy salmon and fruity yogurt shake are delicious.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: RICHARD MCLEISH; COURTESY OF OSKAR; COURTESY OF DEBBIE SEE; COURTESY OF GRANMONTE ASOKE VALLEY; COURTESY OF MYRTILLE TIBAYRENC; COURTESY OF SANYA SOUVANNA PHOUMA



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LUNCH →

Spaghetti in Cassopina
at **Antiche Carampane**

One reason locals want to keep the hyper-authentic trattoria in San Polo to themselves: pasta sauced with a slow-cooked shellfish stew subtly scented with cloves, nutmeg and cinnamon. "A historic fisherman's recipe," the owner confides.

anticecarampane.com; €25.



↑ SNACK

Polpette at **Trattoria Ca' d'Oro alla Vedova**

At *aperitivo* hour, fight your way to the cramped marble counter of this beloved old osteria hidden off Strada Nuova. The reward is the city's ultimate meatball: crispy on the outside, juicy shredded beef inside. 3912 Cannaregio; €3 for two.



← BREAKFAST

Cichetti at **All'Arco**

Bored with *cornetti*? Start the day at this cult wine bar beloved by vendors from the nearby Rialto Market. The creative *cichetti* (snacks) include addictive crostini with creamy whipped codfish. 436 Calle dell'Ochiale; €3 for two.

SIX DISHES

VENICE

Our abridged meal-by-meal guide to where and what to eat now.



→ FOR THE FLIGHT HOME

Mozzarella mousse

at **Lino Fritto**

A new minimalist take-out spot by the Rialto brings Milanese cool to La Serenissima. Try the black-rice salad, then walk away with a container of velvety mozzarella zinged with anchovies and cherry tomatoes. linofritto.it; €3.50.

—ANYA VON BREMEN

↓ DINNER

Fritto misto
at **Ristorante Wildner**

On a buzzy waterside promenade, this still relatively under-the-radar family restaurant brilliantly updates Venetian cuisine with fresh, regional ingredients. The *fritto misto* of carefully sourced seafood is as light as an air kiss. hotelwildner.com; €25.



← DESSERT

Pastry cream tortelli at **Ristorante Quadri**

At this temple to gastronomy from the visionary owners of Padua's Michelin three-starred Le Calandre, dinner might end with melt-in-the-mouth tortelli made with vanilla pastry cream and a maraschino filling. All that with views of Piazza San Marco. alajmo.it; €24.





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From left: Topas Ecolodge and its somnolent surrounds; Sapa Sisters guide groups through the Tonkinese Alps.



DISCOVERY

SAPA HIGHLANDS

Duncan Forgan cycles, snacks and stumbles his way through this Vietnamese frontier region.

My head is pounding, my legs are weak and my face is a lurid shade of scarlet.

This is not the first time I've been in a sorry state while exploring the mountainous backcountry of northwestern Vietnam. Usually the malady occurs when goaded into chugging rice wine by the men and women of the region's notoriously hard-drinking hill-tribe minorities.

It isn't the demon booze that ails me this time. It's that I've just pedaled 36 kilometers on some of the most beautiful but sadistically graded roads in the country. "One more push, OK?" Eric Eriksen, the Danish manager at Topas Ecolodge, yells over his shoulder. A former policeman with an enviably healthy Scandinavian constitution, Eriksen continues his effortless progress towards the crest. I, on the other hand, am stretching every sinew in my legs, ignoring both the cheerful Hmong children and the tableaux of vivid green rice terraces climbing up the slopes.

Mustering my last bit of strength, I reach the summit. Laid out before me in widescreen splendor is the epic outlook of the countryside around Sapa, the region's premier tourist town. In the foreground, gathered around the cap of a hill like a Roman encampment, are the bungalows of **Topas Ecolodge** (topasecolodge.com; bungalows from US\$110). Beyond lies the towering mass of the Hoang Lien Son mountain range. Christened the Tonkinese Alps by the French, the range includes Fansipan, which at a vertiginous 3,143 meters is the highest peak in Indochina.

Sapa's popularity as a base for trekking and cultural experiences and as a temperate retreat for Vietnamese visitors has sparked a tourist boom with new hotels, such as the **Sapa House Hotel** (sapahouse.com; doubles from US\$70) and the **Hmong Sapa Hotel** (hmongsapahotel.com; doubles from US\$50), opening with the regularity of a metronome. Work has

already begun on the world's longest and highest cable car, a US\$197-million project that will connect Sapa to the top of Mount Fansipan, cutting the arduous three-day trek to the summit to just 15 minutes.

Part of the charm of any visit here is the ever-romantic overnight train ride—the evening express from Hanoi arrives in Lao Cai in time for breakfast. But with last year's completion of the new Hanoi-Lao Cai highway cutting the eight-hour land journey to Sapa from the capital in half, the popularity of the one-time French hill-station is only going to increase. The impact this speedy development will have on Hmong and Red Dao communities who have eked out a living in these highlands for centuries is still unclear—all the more reason to visit soon.

For now, these remote hinterlands remain largely somnolent. From Topas Ecolodge you can arrange treks and bike trips, but doing very little is



Clockwise from top left: The Hill Station Signature Restaurant; sticky rice at the restaurant; a verdant view from Topas Ecolodge; Sapa Sister Lang Yang treks with her son.



equally acceptable. The bungalows are simple and secluded and their private balconies are ideal vantage points from which to survey the scenery. Dining takes place in a lovingly restored stilt house, with the menu covering basic but delicious Vietnamese dishes such as banana flower salad and chicken with ginger.

Nobody could call Sapa frenetic, but it is a step up in pace from the isolation of Topas. The town rose to fame as an airy mountain refuge for the colonial French. Nowadays it is a melting pot of visitors mingling with local Vietnamese and hilltribes. The town is compact, the atmosphere vibrant, especially at the lively central market where textiles are sold a stone's throw from a slightly stomach-churning wet-market. Tourists in hiking gear mill around, many trying to evade the entreaties of women peddling hill-tribe merchandise.

More sophisticated enterprises include **Sapa Sisters** (*sapasisters.*

com; day treks from US\$30), owned and run entirely by women. The trekking business was set up in 2009 by Sapa-based European artists Radek Stypczynski and Ylva Landoff Lindberg, and four of their Hmong friends: Lang Yan, Lang Do, Cho and Zao. Having experienced the difficulties encountered by young Hmong women at finding decent jobs and wages, the six created this self-sustaining and independent venture.

The guides all grew up in the area and have intimate knowledge of the obscure trails that link the villages, valleys and mountains. On our trek we skirt rice fields, spear through bamboo forests and traverse surging rivers on rickety rope bridges. The hike takes us through a number of Hmong villages where black-clad youngsters flash us curious looks and doughty women carry hefty baskets of rice on their backs.

As we end the hike, the sun sags in the sky and I'm ravenous. Luckily

there's the **Hill Station Signature Restaurant** (*thehillstation.com; meal for two \$30*). Owned by two young Danes, Tommy Eggen and Soeren Pindstrup, and wholly staffed by members of area communities, it specializes in imaginative takes on hill-tribe cuisine. Thanks to the Hmong tradition of slaughtering whole animals and wasting nothing, smoked and cured meats are a significant presence on the menu. So too is local rainbow trout, farmed in Sapa, and served sashimi style with hill herbs. I'm all mountain man as I tear into the fleshy feast.

After dinner, the dishes are cleared and replaced with bottles of *ruou*, the local firewater. There's a tasting set of the potent rice-based elixir. I'm not sure if it's the stars burning in the clear mountain night, or the houses of the villages in the valley twinkling below or just the steady parade of *ruou* that has my head dancing. Whichever way, I'm thoroughly intoxicated. ♦



The Great Buddha sits in meditation.

WEEKENDER

FOLLOWING BUDDHA

Timeless temples, cute cafés and the pursuit of enlightenment lure Karryn Miller to Bodh Gaya, one of India's most sacred pilgrimage sites.

Do

Temple hop. The heart of **Mahabodhi Temple** (mahabodhi.mahavihara.org) holds a descendant of the famed bodhi ("enlightenment" in Sanskrit) tree that shaded Buddha during his ascent to nirvana. But this hub of iconography is peppered in places of worship, each with a distinct style, from the **Indosan Nippon Japanese Temple** (*Japanese Temple Road*) with its grand tiled roof, to the lavish, gold-trimmed **Wat Thai Buddhagaya** (watthaibuddhagaya.net).

Eat

Om (*in the Hotel Mahayana compound; meal for two Rs400*) is a small restaurant run by a Tibetan family, serving *momos* and steaming noodle soup. Belly full, browse their range of hand-made gifts, from notebooks to T-shirts to souvenir-worthy slippers. Around the corner is **Be Happy Café** (behappycafebodhgaya.weebly.com; *coffee for two Rs190*), with a Western menu and the best brew in town. Here, nuns and monks rub shoulders with backpackers, gabbing and laughing over hot drinks and sweet treats.

Stay

Book in at the **Bodhgaya Regency** (bodhgayaregency.com; *doubles from Rs6,000*) for a clean but basic room with a hot shower and intermittent Wi-Fi. Like most hotels and guesthouses in the area, the Regency is no-frills, but the staff is friendly and the location is perfect for sightseeing. Kick your feet up and zone out to the cheerful chatter of children playing at the Japanese Temple's school across the road—just another form of mindful meditation. +



Wat Thai Buddhagaya.



Sweet sips at Be Happy Café.



Be Happy Café.



Bodhgaya Regency.

BODH GAYA AT A GLANCE

Getting There

Air India (airindia.in) runs daily flights from New Delhi.

Hot Stop

This is a great detour en route to Varanasi, India's holiest city.

Down the Track

Officials are planning an air-conditioned train to navigate India's Buddhist circuit. To quote the man himself: "It is better to travel well than to arrive."

When to Go

Between October and February, daytime temperatures average in the 20s.

Biggest Buddha

The 25-meter Great Buddha Statue sits near Daijokyo Buddhist Temple.



Mahabodhi temple in Bodhgaya, India.



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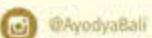
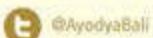
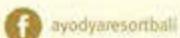


Quintessential Balinese

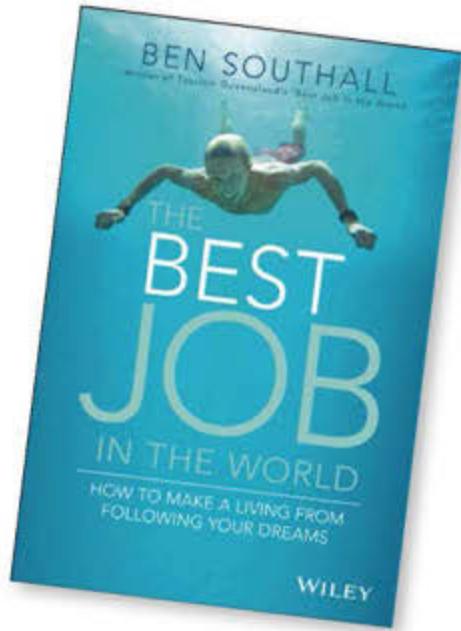
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Radar



BOOKS

BETTER THAN THE BEST

Loads of people like to gripe about their jobs but, at the risk of bragging, we've found the travel industry to be a happy anomaly, full of plummy positions—though none perhaps as sweet as the one Ben Southall scored back in 2009. If the "Best Job in the World" sounds superlative, consider that it was the description for a six-month stint as a caretaker of a tropical island on the Great Barrier Reef, accompanied by an A\$150,000 paycheck. In a much-hyped contest, Tourism Queensland selected the British former event manager over 34,684 candidates for the job, and five years on it seems all involved are still winning. Southall is working as a tourism ambassador, expedition leader and videographer in Australia. He's living the dream so large that he's committed to teaching the rest of us how to as well: his otherwise unimaginatively titled biography, *The Best Job in the World*, goes beyond the usual travel narrative tropes and instead offers practical advice on how to obtain sponsorship, overcome fear, harness social media and other tidbits readers can use to replicate his success and snag a truly brag-worthy career. —IAN LLOYD NEUBAUER



Clockwise from top: Dancing away at Malasimbo 2014; keeping the party afloat on the infamous MalasimBOAT; a festival poster for 2015.



EVENTS

TRIBAL VIBES

Nature-lovers are getting ready to dance, dance, dance for a good cause at Malasimbo in the Philippines next month.

The emerald mountains and deep-blue sparkling waters of Puerto Galera, Oriental Mindoro, are the perfect setting to get in tune with your inner tribal beat and sway your hips in sync with the breezy palm trees that dance atop Mount Malasimbo. Got two left feet? It won't matter as you allow yourself to be intoxicated by the neo-hippie atmosphere of unique light installations, sculptures and a palpable universal rhythm emanating from the array of local and international acts including Taylor McFerrin and Ky-Mani Marley. A culmination of music, art and culture in support of the local Mangyan tribe and their habitat, the

Malasimbo Festival Music & Arts Festival is a standout example of how indulgence can be synonymous with taking action. The festival organizers, working together with the D'Aboville Foundation and the Philippine Department of Environment & Natural Resources, guarantee that proceeds go to projects in the region that promote reforestation and help preserve the tribal traditions. Enjoy fire dancers, a Mangyan Village exhibit, grooving at the infamous floating "MalasimBOAT" party, or simply lounge with a picnic blanket on the grassy slopes sipping a cold beer as the sky blushes orange. *March 6-8; malasimbo.com; adult three-day pass from P7,995.* —STEPHANIE ZUBIRI



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MACANESE GASTRONOMY

The glitz-fueled juggernaut of the Cotai strip casino empires now has foodies seeing stars—Michelin stars. Here, four of our favorite degustation delights. By Stephanie Zubiri



Shrimp dumplings shaped like goldfish, The Eight.



Jade Dragon.



Robuchon au Dôme.



Chocolate banana mille-feuille, The Tasting Room.

DIM SUM

The Eight

Whimsical luxury best describes this three-Michelin-starred Cantonese establishment. Walls of flowing water and projections of fish swimming across the floor set a dramatic stage for the more than 50 fantastically presented lunch options, such as steamed prawn dumplings shaped like delicate goldfish and *char siu bao* in the form of hedgehogs. Come hungry, or with loads of friends, to truly appreciate all the beautiful innovation.

grandlisboahotel.com; dim sum lunch for two MOP400.

INNOVATIVE EUROPEAN

The Tasting Room

Having earned a Michelin star in its first year, 2013, chef Guillaume Galliot's baby is about the perfect wine pairing. Unlike similar spots that focus on the show-off bottle, here they are confident enough to serve lesser-known vintages that shine alongside the food. Don't miss his contemporary take on French onion soup, or his chocolate banana mille-feuille. If you can splurge, go all in for the eight-course tailor-made menu. cityofdreamsmacau.com; tasting menus from MOP828 per person, MOP1,178 with wine pairing.

CHOOSE-YOUR-OWN-

DEGUSTATION LUNCH

Robuchon au Dôme

French powerhouse Joël Robuchon is no newbie to Michelin stars or tasting menus, but this value-for-money lunch set really stands apart. We love the freedom to create our own meal by plucking pieces from a wide selection of his classic dishes including smoked foie gras with sweet corn velouté, and frogs' legs meunière. Pump up the bespoke indulgence with a wine pairing. grandlisboahotel.com; three-course lunch from MOP598 per person, wine flights from MOP320.

CONTEMPORARY CANTONESE

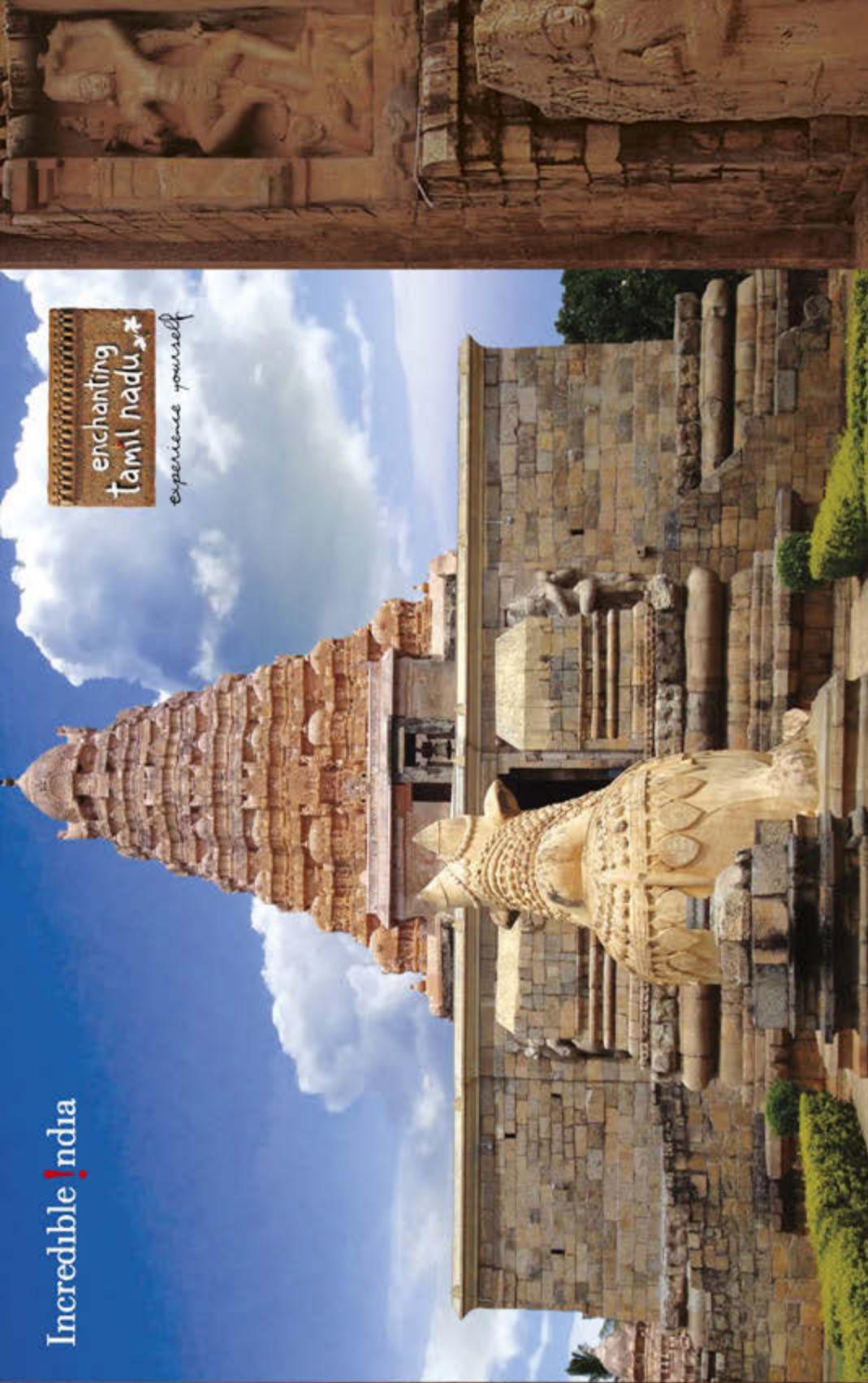
Jade Dragon

Jamón Ibérico and quinoa—chef Tam Kwok Fung is not afraid to use non-traditional elements in the seasonal, modern Cantonese menu at his recently awarded Michelin-starred gem, where he hand-picked everything down to the solid jade dragon chopstick rests. Book the private dining room with a view of the kitchen and create your own degustation. We suggest the honey and lychee wood Iberian pork barbecue. cityofdreamsmacau.com; four courses including house specialties from MOP800 per person. +

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Gangaikonda Cholapuram

Like Father. Like Son.

When Raja Raja Chola's son and successor, Rajendra Chola moved his kingdom's capital from Thanjavur, he carried his father's love for all things spectacular with him. Gangaikonda Cholapuram, was a intricately planned city with a temple as magnificent as the Brihadeeswara, often referred to as its feminine counterpart. Massive, richly carved sculptures, gigantic dwarabalakas and a lion head well are the defining icons of this World Heritage site.

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TRENDING

YOUR OWN PRIVATE AFRICA

From Cape Town to the bush, villas and private estates are the latest way to splurge in South Africa.

Luxurious new rental properties are making it easier than ever to create an extended-family dream trip in South Africa. The Oppenheimer clan turned one of its getaways into **Tarkuni** (tswalu.com; *R84,800 per night for 10 people*), in the Tswalu Kalahari Reserve, the largest private game reserve in the country. The five-suite property has a dedicated chef and a Land Rover for tracking Kalahari lions. + At the **Observatory** (leoboprivatereserve.com; *doubles from R40,000*), guests can explore the Leobo Private Reserve's ancient landscape by off-road buggy or helicopter. The research-grade telescope makes for astronomer-level stargazing. + Oenophiles have a contemporary crash pad in the **Homestead at Oldenburg Vineyards** (oldenburgvineyards.com; *doubles from R14,000*), a 200-year-old farmhouse in the Cape Winelands. The owners stocked the cellar with vintages from nearby wineries. + Perched on Lion's Head in Cape Town, **Villa Two at Ellerman House** (ellerman.co.za; *doubles from R45,000*) looks like a mansion in the Hollywood Hills. The three-bedroom space has a wine gallery with a massive corkscrew sculpture that holds 1,500 rare local bottles—and looks like a set piece out of *Transformers*. —JANE BROUGHTON

The view from
Villa Two at
Ellerman House,
in Cape Town.





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T+L PICKS

SECRET SIPS

Forget neon signage—the coolest cocktail bars in these towns are also the most covert.

By Diana Hubbell



SHANGHAI

The Library Distillery

You need a password to join the elite here. Call to procure one, then slip past the bookshelves, behind a secret door and into the leather- and wood den of Rick Starr for craft tipples and city views. High-rollers shell out for rare bottles from last century, each sold with an antique book printed the same year. *6F 133 Yuanmingyuan Lu, Huangpu Dist.; 86-21/6361-1086; light-n-salt.com; drinks for two RMB180.*

SINGAPORE

Operation Dagger

Look for the rectangle and inverted crown symbol scrawled on a wall to enter to this slick speakeasy with a 6,000-lightbulb art installation. Luke Whearty's inventive concoctions are made with in-house infusions redistilled and packaged in unbranded bottles. Trust the bartender: get a six-drink set served with on-trend treats like kale crisps. *7 Ann Siang Hill; 65/9296-4704; drinks for two S\$50.*

TOKYO

Bar High Five

You may have to fight for one of the few seats at Ginza's legendary hideaway, but master mixologist Hidetsugu Ueno's potent elixirs are more than worth it. Frills are nonexistent and the décor verges on austere, keeping the focus squarely on the perfectly balanced drinks with hand-carved ice. *4F No. 26 Polestar Bldg., 7-2-14 Ginza, Chuo; 81-3/3571-5815; barhighfive.com; drinks for two ¥4,300.*

KUALA LUMPUR

Omakase + Appreciate

Sequestered in an anonymous office building behind a stern NO ADMITTANCE sign, this shoe box-size saloon offers a constantly rotating list of libations, including unconventional sips like the Last Ride Home, with sesame-infused Glenfiddich, ristretto liqueur, and espresso. *GF Bangunan Ming Annexe; 9 Jln. Ampang; 60-3/2022-2238; fb.com/OmakaseAppreciate; drinks for two RM80. +*



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SPOTLIGHT

L.A.'S NEW HIDEAWAYS



The pool at San Vicente Bungalows.

Lombardi House.



The Rose Hotel.

The Chateau. The Pink Palace. The Riot Hyatt. L.A.'s big and buzzy glamour-puss hotels have served as sceney backdrops for the indiscretions of nearly a century's worth of A-listers. But now that paparazzi lenses and cell-phone cameras rule the roost, privacy has become the real luxury. "No one likes coming down to breakfast only to have to take a selfie with a clueless fan," hotelier Jeff Klein says. Klein should know: his Sunset Tower Hotel in West Hollywood is a beloved hangout for regulars like Jennifer Aniston and Tom Ford. But his newest project, a renovation of the historic San Vicente Bungalows, is a decidedly under-the-radar affair, with just 29 rooms, no bar, and a small, shaded pool area. And it points to a growing trend in Los Angeles of discreet, personalized bolt-holes, often in historic buildings, where celebs and civilians alike can cocoon in privacy. "Any city is isolating—L.A. even more so because of the car factor," Klein says. "Now people are craving these intimate hotels." Here are four new favorites.

THE ROSE HOTEL

This 1908 building a block from Venice Beach has served as a party palace and sometime drug den for everyone from Charlie Chaplin to Jim Morrison. Thanks to a boho makeunder by co-owner and fashion photographer Glen

Luchford, the Rose now attracts a stylish mix of off-duty models and creative types. therosehotelvenice.com; doubles from US\$170.

LOMBARDI HOUSE

L.A.'s new "it" interior designer Amber Lewis redid a 1904 Victorian-style

farmhouse hidden behind a gate in the middle of Hollywood. It now houses four multi-bedroom pieds-à-terre with full kitchens and a breezy look of tropical prints and Côte d'Azur stripes. Guests take cues from the resident iguana, sunning themselves on amid flowering fruit trees. lombardihouse.com; suites from US\$375.

SAN VICENTE BUNGALOWS

Jeff Klein transformed a seedy hotel in West Hollywood into a St. Bart's-inspired clubhouse. Bright, no-fuss rooms—white-on-white with platform beds—occupy bungalows around the pool, where the young and beautiful schmooze over BYO beers. With free perks

like breakfast from local favorite Alessandro Caffe, it's one of the best deals in town. A restaurant and yoga studio are in the works. sanvicentebungalows.com; doubles from US\$89.

HOTEL COVELL

Los Feliz's vintage boutiques, throwback bars, and old theater feel worlds away from the velvet ropes of Hollywood. The new five-room hotel above the popular Bar Covell channels the neighborhood vibe with eclectic, macramé-meets-Midcentury interiors, luxe Parachute linens and retro Smeg fridges. Not that you need to cook: the bar's killer mac and cheese is right downstairs. hotelcovell.com; doubles from US\$245.

—COLLEEN CLARK

RICHARD BRANSON'S WAKE-UP CALL

With its debut in Chicago, Virgin Hotels hopes to turn the industry on its ear.



Sir Richard Branson just wants a damn cup of tea. Is that so hard to find?

When the 64-year-old tycoon is on the road, the answer, apparently, is yes. "Most hotels don't serve a decent cup of tea at any hour, let alone after breakfast," he says. How apt, then, that Branson's new hotel serves breakfast—and properly made tea—23 hours a day.

The 250-room **Virgin Hotels**

Chicago, which opened in January, occupies the Old Dearborn Bank Building, a 1928 Deco tower in the Loop. It's the first property from the new Virgin Hotels brand. Hotels are a natural next move for the conglomerate three decades after its first foray into travel. It's easy to forget what an outlier Virgin Atlantic was in 1984: a cheeky interloper in a room full of staid grown-ups. As Branson puts it, Virgin's knack is for "entering stale markets where customers are being ripped off." (Of note: the company just announced plans to launch a cruise line, too.)

In that case, Virgin Hotels couldn't have come at a better (or is that worse?) time. Like airlines, hotels have been nickel-and-diming guests for things they once got for free: optimized Wi-Fi, late checkout, even printing theater tickets. Virgin is doing away with those charges as well as other annoyances. Instead of US\$8 Cokes, mini-bar prices

are set at "street level," and there is no fee for any room-service delivery.

Design-wise, the aim is to restore user-friendliness and common sense. "There are such simple steps that few lifestyle hotels consider but that mean so much to the guest," Branson says. Power outlets by the bed, say, or intuitive lighting controls. Or a clever sliding door that divides rooms into two distinct spaces: the "dressing room," with a bathroom, closets, a vanity and a makeup desk, and the "lounge," with a bed and dining table. "A sliding door is a small detail," Branson says. "But it allows some privacy, blocks out hallway noise, and lets you stay behind closed doors while room service is delivered."

Virgin's philosophy bodes well for today's consumers, who often choose lodgings based less on thread count and square meters than on a hotel's "personality"—which this brand has in spades. We'll see if it adds up to a winning formula—there are plans for properties in Nashville and New York City—and whether travelers will follow Virgin's lead. virginhotels.com; doubles from US\$225.

—PETER JON LINDBERG

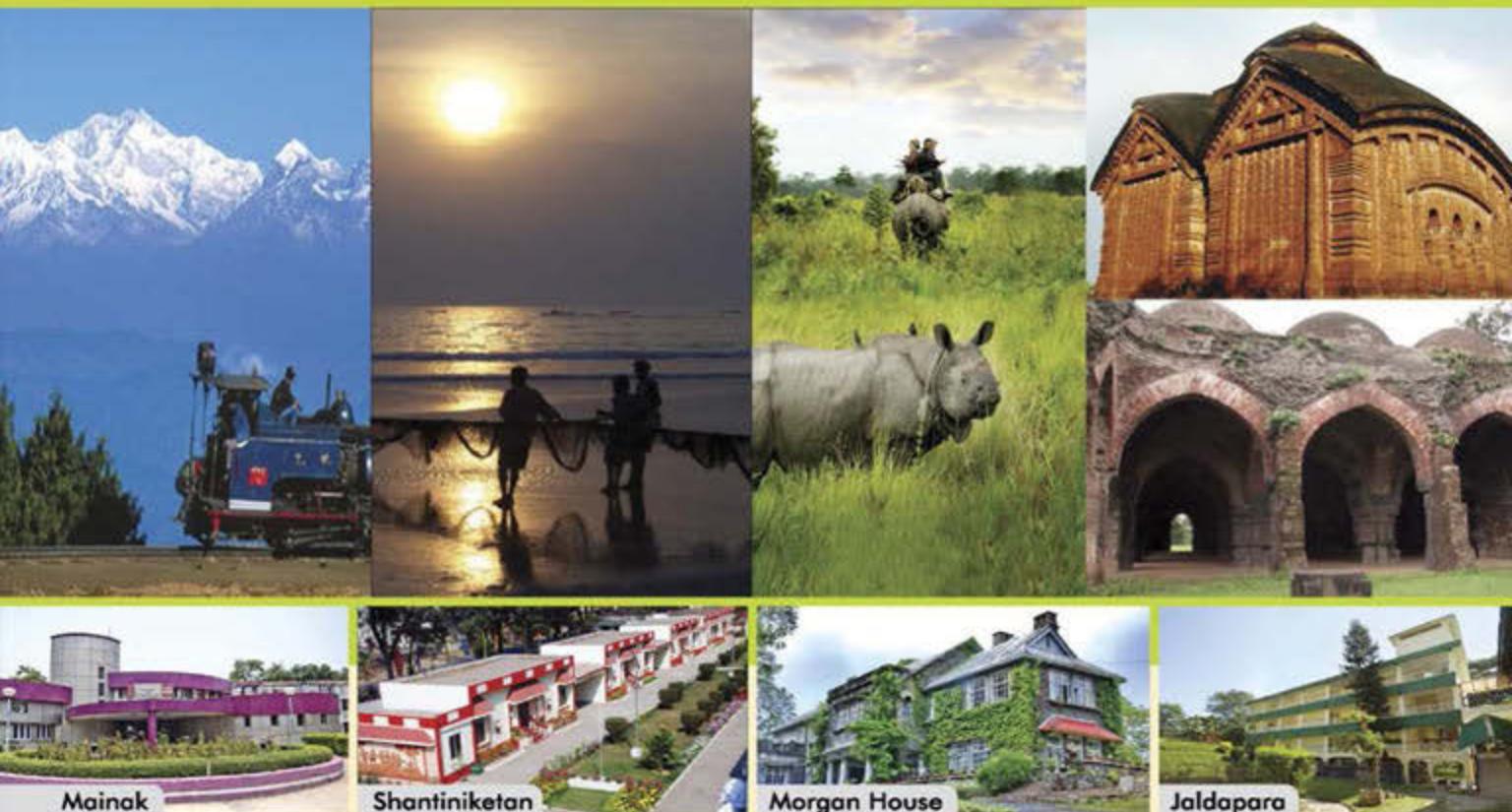
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ESSAY

BUCKING THE BUCKET LIST

Enough with the death wishes. When it comes to planning the ultimate adventure, Ian Lloyd Neubauer realizes, sometimes less is more.

I've done a lot of stupid things in the pursuit of adventure. One time I forked out A\$1,000 to go aerobatic flying over Sydney. Despite skipping breakfast as instructed, my stomach heaved with the violence of a *Game of Thrones* episode as the nimble little plane looped-the-loop, leaving a trail of bile—captured in Technicolor by a GoPro mounted to the cockpit—running into my flight suit.

Things went from bad to worse after we landed and I blacked out on

the runway. When I regained consciousness, I was laid out on a couch in a waiting room, a captive audience for a lanky teenager's long-winded lecture. The avid *Top Gun* fan told me sagely that if I'd only taken the time to do some research I would have known how to rapidly contract my abdominals when the G-force hit, and I wouldn't have gotten so sick. So it was with more than a modicum of pleasure that I saw said Maverick, limp as a teddy bear and

pale as a ghost, being carried by the pilot back into the waiting room a short while later. Yeah, that's a negative, Ghost Rider. You lasted less than 10 minutes, whereas I'd endured an entire half hour. Booya!

Yet, I asked myself six hours later when I finally regained enough balance to drive home: did that make me stronger or wiser? Or had I fallen prey to that modern-age obsession—the bucket list? It was starting to play like a vicious cycle, my quest to tick a →



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never-ending series of increasingly risky and expensive boxes that deliver bragging rights and Facebook likes in spades but never quite hit the spot. It seemed like I was always left with that unscratchable itch. Noting the competitive edge creeping into my and my friends' To-Do lists, I realized that maybe I needed to re-examine the whole notion. Rather than a tally of things to do before you kick the bucket, bucket lists today are starting to read like a twisted itemization of elaborate ways to kick the bucket. Take that guy who made the news for donning a protective suit and trying to get an anaconda to swallow him alive. The mind reels.

Yes, I hear the stories and roll my eyes, but honestly my list isn't much better. After cage-diving with great white sharks on a remote island off the coast of South Australia last year, I went swimming with humpback whales, sans cage, where I came dangerously close to being smacked into the afterlife by a five-meter-wide tail fin as I swam at the behemoth in a mad fit of voyeur-driven invincibility gained from watching too many episodes of *Man vs. Wild*. "It is almost a perversity of human nature that just when things are comfortable and easy, we say 'this is too cushy' and throw ourselves challenges and group them on a bucket list," says Dr. Jayashri Kulkarni, a professor of psychiatry at Melbourne's Monash University. "It can be quite destructive for thrill-seekers who continually crave novelty. In extreme cases, it's an almost quasi-suicide or passive-suicide meditation. There is no plan to kill oneself, but the logic says, 'I am going to leave it in the hands of the gods if I live or die.'"

Hang on, Dr. Fun Buster... Isn't the act of pushing ourselves to our limits and facing our fears a key to self-actualization? And isn't managing one's goals on a list nothing but evidence of an organized brain? And—mindful of the 2007 film, *The Bucket List*, in which Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman's terminally ill characters drive around America trying to compact a life's worth of adventure into one road trip—

shouldn't we try to conquer the world while we're young and spry enough to make memories, instead of as a last-ditch grasp at immortality? "Yes that's true," Kulkarni allows. "The bucket list promotes forward thinking, it promotes mental health and fitness and the overall broadening of one's horizons. But," she adds, "the problem is not the list; it's the things people put on their lists. For example, tightrope-walking between buildings is not a reasonable way to challenge and expand one's physical and mental boundaries. On the other hand, running a marathon—now that's a perfectly good thing to put on your bucket list."

THE TIGHTLY REGULATED, MINIMAL-CASUALTY SPORT OF PARACHUTING FROM A PLANE LOST ITS ALLURE IN THE ORGY OF SHARKS AND LOOP-THE- LOOPS THAT HAD BECOME MY SPARE TIME

OK, but to me, running 42 kilometers in one go sounds more deathly than doing backflips in a plane. I wanted to take the good doctor's advice, but didn't want to downshift my thrill-seeking that abruptly. So though I resisted a jaunt to Hong Kong for a spot of "riot tourism" and stopped fantasizing about waterfall kayaking (the YouTube videos are insane), I still latched onto Kulkarni's idea of broadening one's horizons—and opted to take it literally. I decided to go skydiving.

Wait, hear me out. Sure, you have to sign a liability waiver, but in the catalogue of activities requiring you to waive liability, it's relatively tame. Which, I suppose, is why I'd never done it. When I was growing up in the 1980's, skydiving topped my bucket list. It was my bucket list. But the tightly regulated, minimal-casualty

sport of parachuting from a plane had lost its allure in the orgy of sharks and loop-the-loops that had become my spare time. So here I was, 40 years old and still a skydiving virgin. I made the call. A few days later I found myself back at the same airport in western Sydney where I'd undergone aerial torture five years earlier. As we climbed into the sky in a little noisy little Cessna, I asked my tandem instructor, a cheeky Argentinean who would be manning my chute, if people ever chicken out in the 11th hour. "It happens once in a while," he shouted. "But it's very hard to hear up here, so if someone yells 'No, no, no!' it sounds a lot like 'Go, go, go' and we do it anyway." So much for not leaving it in the hands of the gods.

We jumped. It was an odd sensation, a lifetime in the making. Perhaps for the average person, jumping out of a plane seems gutsy, but for me it was marked departure from my usual bucket-list stunts. I was indulging in a fun activity I actually *wanted* to do, instead of a gut-wrenching feat I felt I *should* do to stoke my status as an intrepid explorer. I wasn't competing with anyone, because any of my perceived daredevil rivals had long ago earned this stripe. I could just enjoy the ride. And as I tried my best to take in everything on the endlessly broad horizon while plummeting through the air with my Argentinean backpack hollering encouragement, I resolved to at least partially eschew my adrenaline addiction for whatever experiences naturally arise on my travels, be it a forest stroll or a meal with a local family.

I don't need to tango with death to have a memorable vacation, and if I leave a few spots empty on my dance card, who knows what surprises might fill those beckoning blanks. Back on solid ground, I decided the most thrilling part of skydiving was neither reaching terminal velocity of 190 kilometers an hour, nor the smooth, peaceful descent back to earth after the parachute was deployed. It was flicking my hair back after landing on earth and knowing I had nothing left to prove. For now. +



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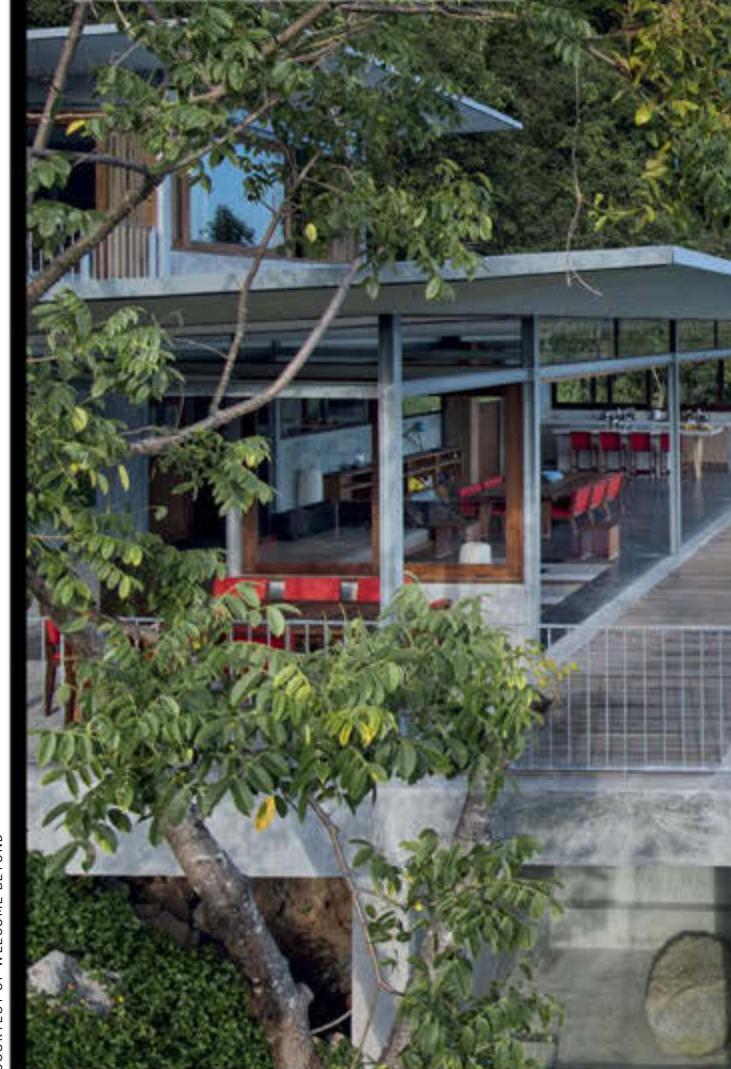
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Trip Doctor

T+L'S GUIDE TO
**THE NEW
WORLD OF
VACATION
RENTALS**



COURTESY OF WELCOME BEYOND

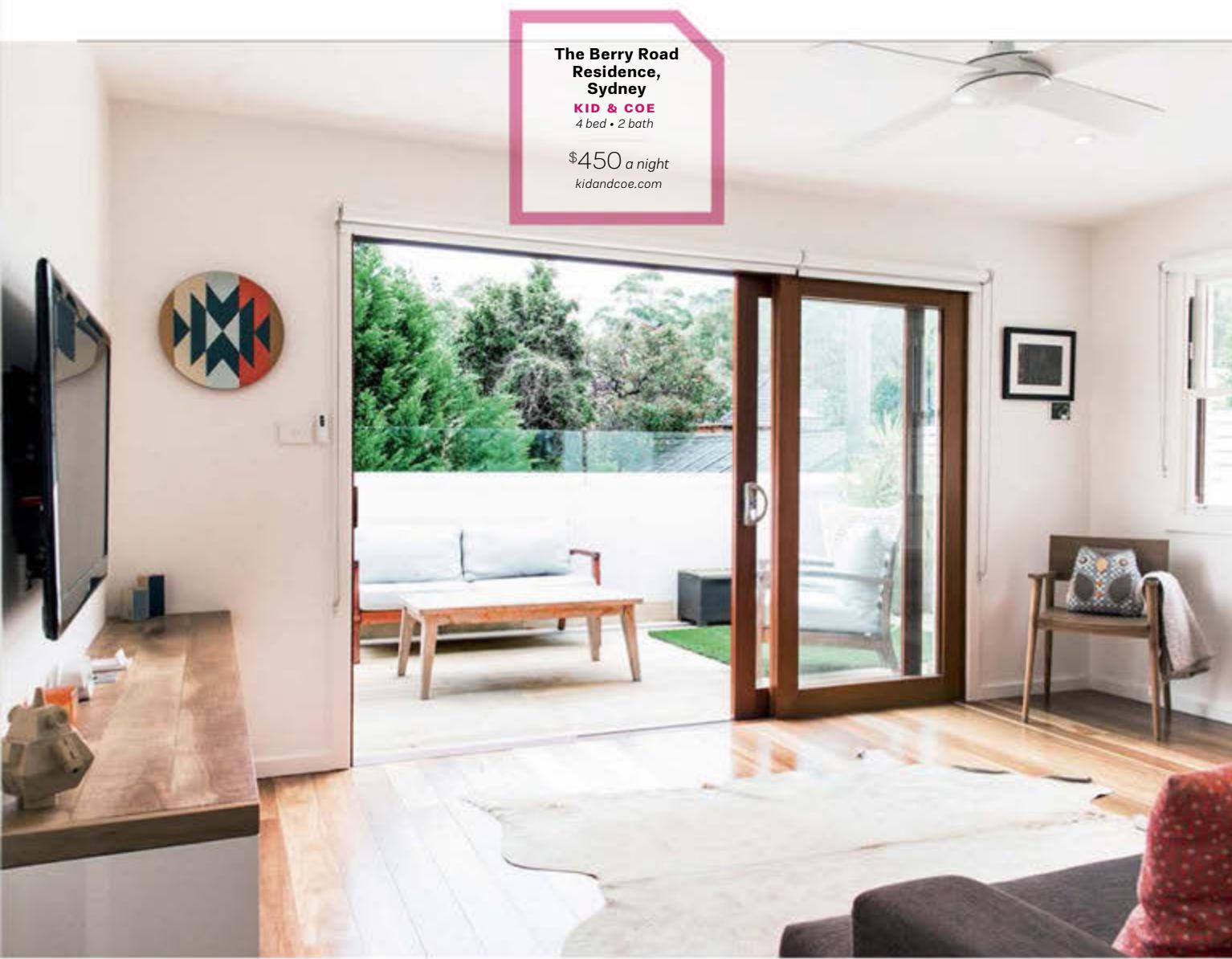
The Naked House, Koh Samui

WELCOME BEYOND
3 bed • 5 bath

\$375 a night
welcomebeyond.com

The rise of booking sites and boutique agencies has made renting a villa, a house or an apartment more attractive—and common—than ever. But choosing the right place hasn't necessarily gotten easier. Read on for T+L's guide to navigating the new landscape.

Strategies



THE MICRO HOTELIERS

A new breed of vacation-rental owners is taking a page from hotels and bringing more polish and professionalism to the industry.

By Grant Martin

Two years ago, when Jeremy Braud started renting out his shotgun house in the Algiers neighborhood of New Orleans to Super Bowl fans, the property was simple and spartan. Braud used his own sheets; he stocked the bathroom with big bottles of shampoo and conditioner. But now that vacation rentals have become more popular and competitive through online-booking sites, Braud has refined his approach. He now offers small, single-use shampoo bottles and high-thread-count Egyptian-cotton sheets. On the living room table, there's a fan of tourism brochures and a free bottle of wine for his guests. Braud's house is no longer just a home. Nor is it a short-term rental in the old-fashioned sense. It's now a competitor to the B&B down the street.

Braud is on the leading edge of vacation-rental entrepreneurs who are starting to adopt the manners and methods of the hotel industry, blurring the line

between traditional hotelier and anonymous property owner. It's a strategy aimed at expanding their potential client base beyond the budget traveler and into a much broader, and more lucrative, market—one that even includes people on the road for business trips.

Online rental agencies have started to adapt their tactics, too. Airbnb brought in hotelier Chip Conley, founder of the Joie de Vivre group of hotels, to head up global hospitality and strategy. Conley's goal is to help rental owners deliver some of the consistency of a hotel by standardizing things like communication, cleanliness guidelines and amenities. (Airbnb's instant-booking feature is especially hotel-like.) HomeAway, meanwhile, is offering a batch of new tools to create a more seamless experience, including integrating its app with Uber and the grocery delivery service Instacart, and populating it with information about the property a guest has rented and its surrounding area (sort of like a hotel-room directory).

A slew of third-party tools have emerged to address the rise of peer-to-peer rentals. Sites like Klik Asia, Guesty and Rentingyourplace help hosts with the process of researching and managing vacation properties so that they can charge the right price and align their services with nearby hotels. Guesty, formerly called Superhost, goes one step farther and remotely manages the nitty-gritty details of hosting. For a modest 3-percent fee, they'll do



everything from screen guest profiles to organize cleaning services. It's even possible for renters to compare Airbnb properties with hotel rooms when planning a trip, thanks to the online travel agent Hipmunk.

Other companies and services offer some of the amenities associated with a traditional hotel stay to short-term renters. Apps like FitnessCoach and Spinlister help travelers bypass resort fitness centers, while others provide everything from airport pickup to ice cream delivery (see below).

All of this has put the hotel establishment on notice. So far, the response from individual brands is anecdotal (Marriott CEO Arne M.

Sorenson reportedly talks about the rental industry all the time). But in popular tourism destinations like Bali and Singapore, authorities have cracked down on non-traditional, short-term accommodation for breaking rental laws.

While global regulation of the vacation-rental business is unlikely, location-specific legislation will continue to roll out over the next several years. But even if tomorrow's host has to follow a stricter set of rules, it's clear that vacation rentals have been fundamentally transformed. Hosts like Jeremy Braud will continue to compete with hotels—and the costs for consumers will continue to fall.

Apps and sites that turn a rental into a hotel

GrabCar

Need an airport pickup? GrabCar is a limousine service currently available in Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines. *Free; Android, BlackBerry, iOS.*

The Inspired Chef

If you're craving artisanal "boutique" ice cream in Singapore, place an order a day ahead and you'll get two pints, metal spoons and serviettes delivered. *inspiredchef.sg.*

Ayibang

Choose from a list of housekeepers in Beijing, Shanghai and Chengdu for fresh linens and clean laundry. Home-cooking service is also in the works. *Free; Android, iOS.*

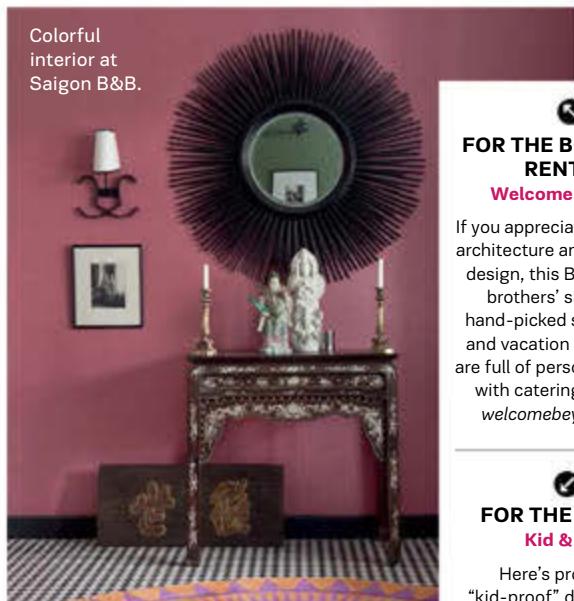
Viator

You don't need a concierge to book food crawls, cultural guides, and walking tours. Viator offers thousands of excursions around the world. *Free; Android, iOS.*

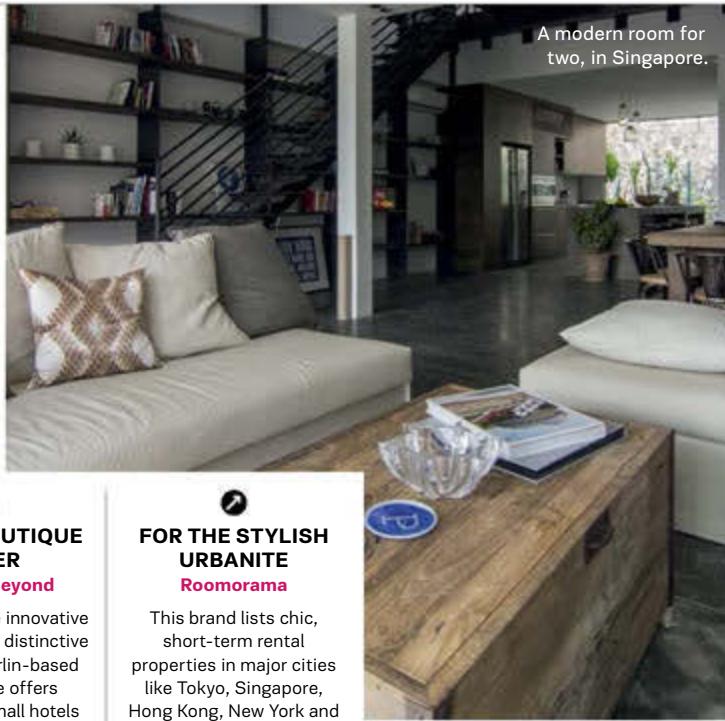
Strategies

SPECIAL HANDLING

Niche rental companies are cropping up to address travelers' hyper-specific needs, whether that means a house with a high chair or a tree lodge with mellow meals. Here, four we love.



Children's room at The Berry Road Residence, Sydney.



A modern room for two, in Singapore.

FOR THE BOUTIQUE RENTER *Welcome Beyond*

If you appreciate innovative architecture and distinctive design, this Berlin-based brothers' site offers hand-picked small hotels and vacation rentals that are full of personality, some with catering included. welcomebeyond.com.

FOR THE FAMILY *Kid & Coe*

Here's proof that "kid-proof" doesn't have to mean blah—even in popular spots like Bali or Chiang Mai. Listings include details like whether or not there are baby monitors and the distance to the nearest park. kidandcoe.com.

FOR THE STYLISH URBANITE *Roomorama*

This brand lists chic, short-term rental properties in major cities like Tokyo, Singapore, Hong Kong, New York and Paris. Payment is done through a secure code handed over to a host at check-in. roomorama.com.

FOR THE (FIVE-STAR) HOTEL LOYALIST *Private Residences by SLH*

The 42 chalets, villas and yachts are as luxe as you'd expect from SLH. The best part: one booking makes you a highest-tiered member of the loyalty program. privateresidences.slh.com.



An SLH property in Koh Samui that can house up to 15 guests.



HOW TO FIND YOUR DREAM RENTAL

Most of the large booking sites don't vet all their inventory, so it's up to you to approach each listing with a critical eye. Below, T+L's tips for searching intelligently. By Brooke Porter Katz

CAST A WIDE NET

Start with an aggregator like Tripping.com, which searches more than 2 million listings on partner sites that include FlipKey, HomeAway and 9Flats. Once you find a rental, see if it's run by an owner or a management company. The latter can usually respond more quickly and reliably than an owner, who may not have a handyman on call. Note that some properties appear on multiple sites—and rates can vary greatly between them. For example, we found listings for the same house in Bali that ranged from \$240 (Roomorama) to \$380 (Flipkey) for the same night in June.

KNOW HOW LISTINGS ARE ORGANIZED

It's important to understand how sites display search results. FlipKey, for example, rewards hosts for good behavior (fast response rates, new photos, up-to-date calendars) by giving them greater visibility. HomeAway offers tiered membership: the more an owner pays, the higher his listing ranks. (Not always a bad thing: paying more could be a sign of a pro.) Cut through the fat by using the HomeAway Sort, which prioritizes a combination of membership tier and host behavior. On Airbnb, look for listings

with a "verified photos" caption (which means the site photographed the property) or a Superhost badge, achieved after hitting various milestones like completing at least 10 stays and receiving 80 percent five-star reviews.

READ REVIEWS

Seeing what past guests have to say can provide invaluable insight into what you are (and are not) getting. When possible, book on sites that authenticate reviews—allowing only people who have actually stayed at the property to write in. Both Airbnb and HomeAway do this. And know the signs of fraud:

if there is an unrealistic number of overly gushing reviews, beware.

BE AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT

When using Airbnb and other rent-by-owner sites, it helps to share a little about yourself (where you're from, what type of traveler you are) on your profile or in the request to book. Remember: hosts are appraising you as much as you are them. (On Airbnb, instant booking is available only to renters with robust profiles and solid reviews from hosts.) If you have lingering questions for the owner or manager, don't be afraid to pick up the phone.

What to look for in a listing

Photos

Quantity and quality matter—the more professional-looking the pictures, the more serious the host.

Reviews

The best ones reconfirm details and amenities you've read about in the listing.

Updated calendars

To avoid inquiring about a property that's not actually available, always look to see when the host has last refreshed the calendar.

Response time

Hosts typically have 24 hours to respond to a booking request. (Factor this into your planning timeline.) Many sites actually display each host's average response time—so you can get a sense of when (or if) to expect an answer.

Strategies

WHAT YOU GET ON...

There's a wide world of properties out there and nearly as many agencies with exclusive access to them. Here's what we found on four popular sites—and their costs per night, as of press time.

AIRBNB



Bamboo house, Bali
\$325 3 bed • 3 bath



Korean traditional house, Seoul
\$180 2 bed • 2 bath



Urban apartment, Tokyo
\$89 1 bed • 1 bath

VRBO



Casa Sol, India
\$713 3 bed • 3 bath



The Khmer House, Siem Reap
\$621 6 bed • 5 bath



Niseko chalet, Japan
\$500 4 bed • 2½ bath

PERFECT PLACES



Ambassador's House, Sri Lanka
\$578 5 bed • 5 bath



Moonlight Villa, Bali
\$695 4 bed • 4 bath



Patong Hill Estate 5, Phuket
\$927 5 bed • 5 bath

ROOMORAMA



Serene Retreat, New Zealand
\$1,870 1 bed • 1 bath



Apartment, Taipei
\$130 2 bed • 1 bath

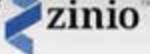


Acqua Villa, Nha Trang, Vietnam
\$420 4 bed • 5 bath

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I TEND TO BOOK AT THE LAST MINUTE. HOW DO I STAY SPONTANEOUS, BUT SKIP CRAZY COSTS AND STILL TRAVEL IN COMFORT?

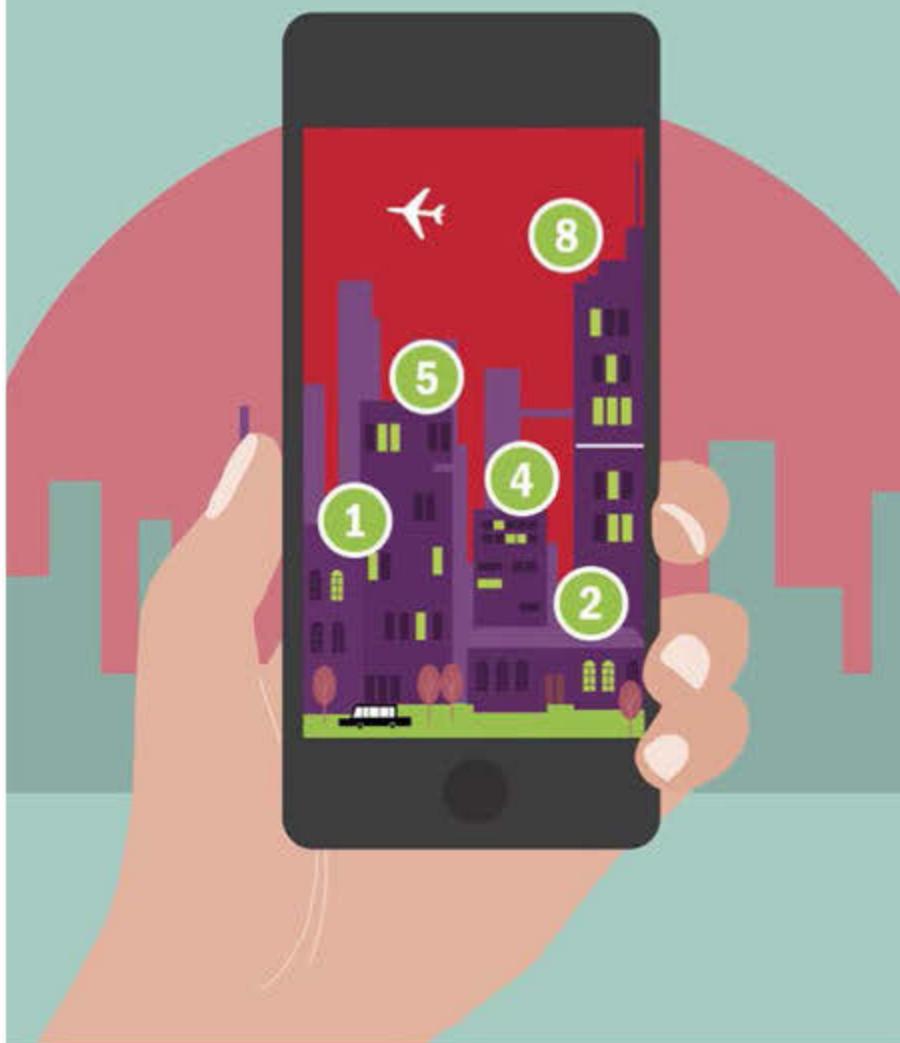
Thanks to the ability to plan a trip with a few clicks, many travelers are taking your approach. Luckily, companies are making it cheaper than ever to let your free-spirit fly.

Mobilize discounts

If you're looking to organize a spur-of-the-moment getaway, the odds are that most of the tools you need are already in the palm of your hand. According to ITB Berlin's 2014 data, travelers are most likely to make spontaneous trip decisions via smartphones or tablets: a full 70 percent of hotel bookings made on mobile devices are for reservations beginning a mere 24 hours or less in advance.

That may well be because there are a plenty of apps and websites that cater specifically to capricious globetrotters. The pioneer of the genre is **HotelTonight**, an easy-to-navigate app that got its start by offering steep discounts on same-day hotel reservations, though it recently increased its booking window to up to seven days out. Unfortunately, although the app has some steals in Europe and North America, it has yet to conquer Asia. If you're staying within the region, you're better off going with the similar app **HotelQuickly**, which has savings on same-day bookings in Australia, New Zealand and most of Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, the mobile-only **CheckInTonight.asia**, which claims to save customers up to 70 percent, offers discounts on same-day bookings in 18 locations throughout seven Southeast Asian countries. The website **LateStays** (lateslays.com) also specializes in Asia and allows you to screen results by neighborhoods within cities. In other words, if you'd rather steer clear of Bangkok's notorious backpacker-land, Khao San Road, the site will guide you to less flip-flop-friendly parts of town.

You probably know about **Travelzoo** (travelzoo.com), which



showcases time-sensitive deals on hotels and tours around the world. A recent search netted bargains including a five-star Bangkok hotel at nearly half price, more than 60 percent off of a luxury Shanghai stay, and a pool villa in Ubud, for 40 percent of its original rate. The savings can be significant, but it may require some patience to sift through it all.

Get flexible with flights

If you can afford to pick up and go at a moment's notice, you can land unbelievable discounts on the flight, as well. The new app **Hitlist** (hitlistapp.com), from TripCommon, lets you enter the places on your wanderlust wishlist and then sends you push alerts when there are ticket deals there—which they break into the categories of “good,” “great” and “spectacular.” Classic sites **LMT** (lastminutetravel.com) and **lastminute.com** also have discounted options in Asia. One of the best tools to use though is that oldie-but-goodie **Priceline** (priceline.com), which can save you up to 40 percent. Our favorite feature is the website's Name Your Own Price section, which lets you do just that: you pick your dates, departure and destination, and say how much you'd be willing to shell out for a ticket. If an airline agrees to your price, the website will automatically book the tickets for you. The catch is that you won't know your exact travel times until the *very* last minute... but for some that might just add to the adventure.

Cut your losses

Let's say you were planning to island hop from Koh Phi Phi to Phuket, but are having so much fun at your first destination that you can't bear to leave. Even if you've

already pre-paid for your presumed next hotel and it's non-refundable, there's still a chance that you can get some of your money back. **Ccancelon** (cancelon.com) will let you sell your booking for a reduced rate. The site takes a 10 percent cut, but you'll still avoid losing everything.

If you need to ditch a non-refundable plane ticket, first make sure you read the fine print; “non-refundable” doesn't always mean “immutable.” Consider whether you'll be able to travel to that original destination at any point in the future, because many airlines allow you to change your flights dates—for a fee—on even the lowest fare classes. Or, you might want to phone a friend: budget Thai carrier **Nok Air** (nokair.com), for example, allows you to change the passenger's name on a ticket for minimal cost. But if you just want to bail and move on, **ChangeYour Flight** (changeyourflight.com) lets you request a partial refund from your airline, which will then try to resell the ticket at a reduced rate. Unfortunately, it only works with a relatively short list of partner airlines—for now, their Asian carriers include the Singapore-based Scoot Airlines and Malaysia Airlines' low-cost subsidiary Firefly, though they hope to add others in the near future.

Reach out

Finally, never be shy to reach out directly to hotels and see if there's anything available. Follow your favorite brands or boutiques on social media networks and drop them a polite tweet before you're planning to be in their extended neighborhood. If it's off-peak season and there are extra rooms to fill, you never know what savings they might be able to offer. +



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Deals

READER EXCLUSIVES

THIS MONTH'S BEST DEALS

From a butler-drawn bath complete with champagne in Singapore to a five-course candlelit dinner on the beach in Thailand, these offers shoot for the heart like Cupid's arrow.



A QT King Deluxe room at QT Sydney, in Australia.

ROMANCE

SYDNEY **The Deal** Agent Provocateur from QT Sydney (qtsydney.com.au), an eccentric blend of Art Deco, Gothic and Italianate architecture in the CBD. **Stay** A night in a QT King Deluxe. **The Highlights** A private fitting with Agent Provocateur lingerie; a limited edition Agent Provocateur blue Swarovski-embroidered eye mask; and an espresso martini kit for two. **Cost** From A\$410, double, through June 31. **Savings** 42 percent.

Super Saver HANOI

The Deal Valentine by Pullman from Pullman Hanoi (pullman-hanoi.com), near Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum and old quarter of Hanoi. **Stay** Two nights in a Silksand Deluxe room. **The Highlights** An upgrade to an Executive room or suite based on availability; and dinner with a bottle of house wine for two. **Cost** From US\$218 (US\$109 per night), double, book by February 14. **Savings** 50 percent.

THAILAND

The Deal My Sweet Valentine from Putahracs (putahracs.com), a beachfront stay close to the Hua Hin resort town's night market. **Stay** Two nights in a Silksand Deluxe room. **The Highlights** Sweet Escape spa package for two, including a Strawberry Scrub, Floral massage, and chocolate-covered strawberries with two glasses of sparkling wine; and a five-course Love Inspired set dinner on the beach with two glasses of wine. **Cost** From Bt19,000 (Bt9,500 per night), double, February 1-28. **Savings** 20 percent.

SINGAPORE

The Deal Be My Valentine package from the Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore (ritzcarlton.com/singapore), modern geometrical design meets 4,200-piece art collection in Marina Bay. **Stay** A night in a Premier suite. **The Highlight** A relaxing Second Honeymoon butler-drawn bath—with therapeutic lavender, geranium and bergamot oil—complete with a bottle of Louis Roederer champagne and panoramic city skyline. **Cost** From S\$999, double, February 13-15. **Savings** Up to 35 percent.

PHUKET The Deal Romantic Getaway package from Trisara (trisara.com), ocean-facing pool villas, suites and private residences on the island's quiet northwestern coast. **Stay** Three nights in an Ocean View Pool villa. **The Highlights** A gourmet barbecue and a bottle of house champagne in-villa for two; a 90-minute Thai or oil massage before sunset at Trisara Spa; and round-trip airport transfers. **Cost** From US\$5,055 (US\$1,685 per night), double, through April 30. **Savings** 25 percent.

BORACAY The Deal Romantic Escape from the District Boracay (thedistrictboracay.com), a beachfront boutique in the Philippines. **Stay** Two nights in a Premier room. **The Highlights** A 30-minute *paraw* sailing trip; a 60-minute massage; and round-trip airport transfers. **Cost** From P27,800 (P13,900 per night), double, book by March 31. **Savings** Up to 29 percent.

BANGKOK The Deal Romance in Bangkok from Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Bangkok (sheratongrandesukhumvit.com), in the center of Asoke business district. **Stay** Two nights in a renovated Grande room. **The Highlights** Daily breakfast-in-bed for two, plus a bottle of champagne and fresh flowers. **Cost** From Bt15,900 (Bt7,950 per night), double, through March 31. **Savings** Up to 25 percent.

BEIJING The Deal Somewhere Only We Know from Traders Hotel, Beijing (shangri-la.com/beijing/traders), at China World Trade Centre in the business and embassy district. **Stay** A night in a Traders Club room. **The Highlights** A candlelit dinner for two at T-Bazaar and two tickets to see the Chinese movie *Somewhere Only We Know* at Cinema Palace. **Cost** From RMB499, double, on February 14. **Savings** 32 percent.

FOOD & DRINK

CHINA The Deal Opening promotion from JW Marriott Hotel Chongqing (marriott.com), a 454-room newcomer in China's western economic hub. **Stay** A night in a Deluxe room. **The Highlight** Buffet breakfast for one person at additional RMB1, plus 50 percent discount on buffet breakfast for the second person. **Cost** From RMB800, double, through February 28. **Savings** 26 percent.

BEIJING The Deal Suite Champagne Moment from the Ritz-Carlton, Beijing (ritzcarlton.com), in the heart of Chaoyang commercial district. **Stay** Two nights in an Executive or Carlton suite. **The Highlight** A bottle of Moët & Chandon Imperial for those staying in Executive suite, or Moët & Chandon Rose for those staying in Carlton suite. **Cost** From RMB6,800 (RMB3,400 per night), double, through February 28. **Savings** Up to 20 percent.

SAIGON The Deal Glamorous Rooftop Proposal from Pullman Saigon Centre (pullman-saigon-centre.com), 306 modern rooms and suites near Ben Thanh market. **Stay** A night in a Deluxe room. **The Highlight** A three-course set dinner for two at Cobalt Rooftop Restaurant. **Cost** From US\$228, double, through December 31. **Savings** 20 percent.

PENANG The Deal Romance Indulgence from Shangri-La's Rasa Sayang Resort and Spa (shangri-la.com), Minangkabau architecture surrounded by century-old trees. **Stay** A night in a Rasa Premier room. **The Highlights** Daily Rasa Wing's afternoon tea and evening cocktail; and a Rasa Asmaradana or Chi Balance spa treatment for two. **Cost** From RM1,060, double, through February 28. **Savings** 35 percent.

BEACH

GREAT BARRIER REEF The Deal Soft opening offer from Lizard Island (lizardisland.com.au), back in operation after a 12-month renovation following Cyclone Ita. **Stay** A night in a Garden room. **The Highlight** Special discount for a stay during the soft-opening phase March 1-31. **Cost** From A\$1,274, double, through March 31. **Savings** 25 percent.

BALI The Deal Best of Bali from Design Hotels (designhotels.com), representing more than 280 independent, stylish properties in more than 50 countries across the globe. **Stay** Four nights in a standard room at one of six Bali properties. **The Highlight** A complimentary fourth night at Alila Manggis, Alila Ubud, Delmango Villa Estate, Alila Villas Soori, Alila Villas Uluwatu and Luna2 Private hotel. **Cost** From US\$405 (US\$135 per night), double, through March 31. **Savings** Up to 30 percent.

MANILA The Deal Opening offer from New World Manila Bay Hotel (newworldhotels.com), a 376-room hotel with an adjoining 13,936-square-meter casino. **Stay** Two nights in a City Bay View room. **The Highlights** Access to Residence Club Living Room executive lounge, including benefits such as all-day snacks and evening cocktails; 25-percent discount at the hotel's dining outlets; and 15-percent discount on massages. **Cost** From P13,600 (P6,800 per night), double, through March 31. **Savings** 35 percent. +

two; chocolate and a bottle of sparkling wine upon arrival; romantic turndown treat with a bouquet of flowers; and shuttle to Phuket town. **Cost** From Bt12,165, double, on February 14. **Savings** 35 percent.

CITY

BANGKOK The Deal Bangkok Celebration from Avani Atrium (avanihotels.com), a new opening on New Petchaburi Road. **Stay** A night in a Premier room. **The**

Highlight Thirty percent discount on the best available rate with daily buffet breakfast for two. **Cost** From Bt1,470, double, through February 28. **Savings** Up to 30 percent.

PHUKET The Deal Valentine's Retreat from Regent Phuket Cape Panwa (regenthotels.com), with a hilltop spa that overlooks the Andaman Sea. **Stay** A night in an ocean-view Pavilion. **The Highlights** Thai set dinner for



A Surprise & Delight set up at Trisara pool villa, in Phuket.



PAVILION IN PARADISE

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Hotels



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February 2015



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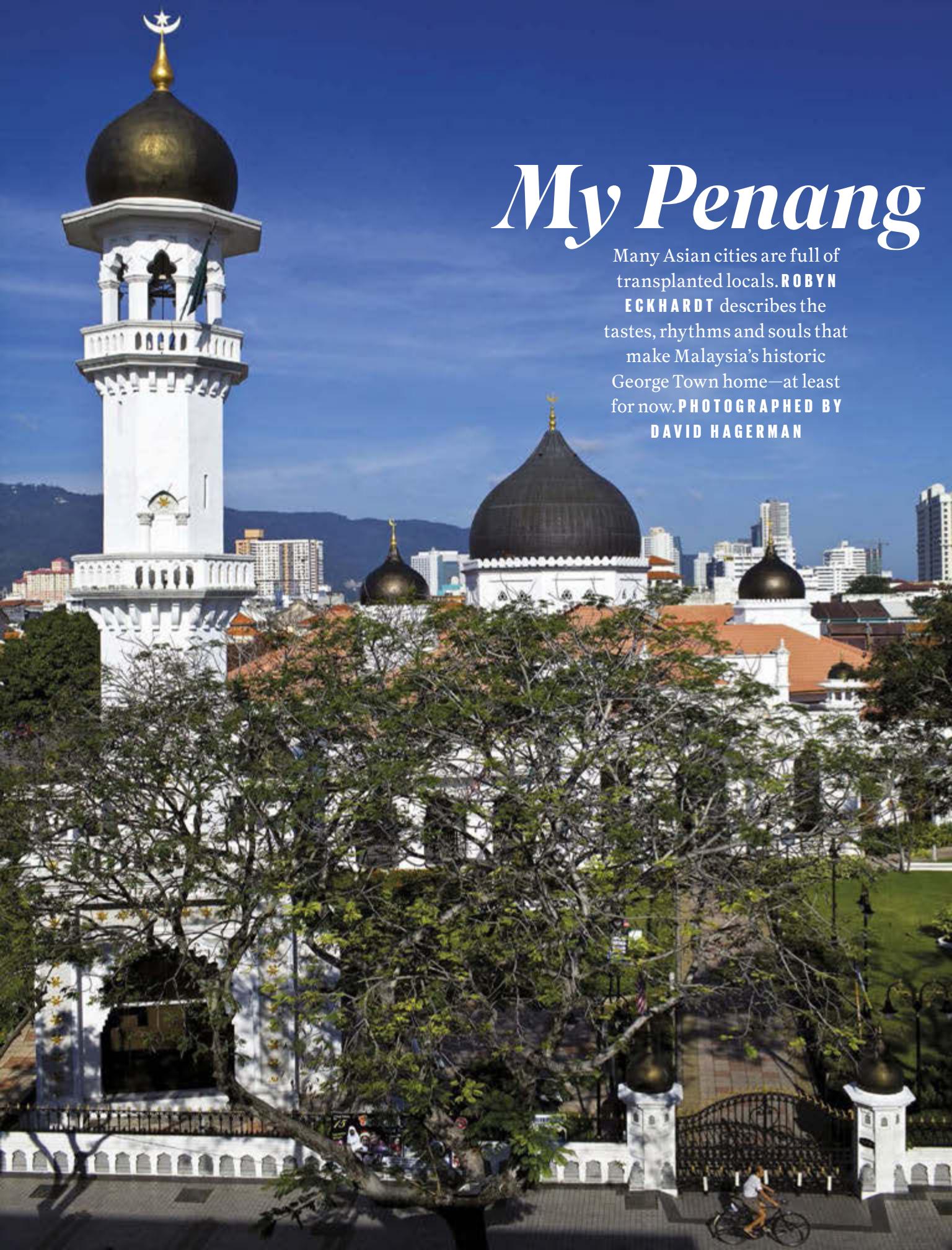
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In Little India, songkok (caps worn by Muslim men) are still made by hand. **Opposite:** Kapitan Keling Mosque, on Penang's Street of Harmony.



My Penang

Many Asian cities are full of transplanted locals. **ROBYN**

ECKHARDT describes the tastes, rhythms and souls that make Malaysia's historic George Town home—at least for now. **PHOTOGRAPHED BY DAVID HAGERMAN**

D

uck soup and charcoal are the first things I smell each morning at daybreak, when I leave my house to walk my dogs. We round our first corner at the *koay teow th'ng* cart, and it's all I can do to not stop for a bowl of silky rice noodles in clear, deep broth when I see the soup pot steaming over coals. I keep moving, down the alley marked by a shrine in which the *koay teow th'ng* seller has left an offering of coffee and *nasi lemak*, to the knock-up curry stall where an Indian Muslim man is frying chicken cloaked in bright orange powdered chili. We keep on to Campbell Street Market. I breathe in fresh pandan leaves and grated coconut, then hold my nose against less appealing scents wafting from the market's live poultry section.

I nod to one of the Burmese holding a chicken's neck in one hand and a cleaver in the other, and to early-bird shoppers carrying plastic baskets overflowing with *choy sum*, *gai lan*, spinach, scallions. On the home stretch I pass Oil Man—the unsmiling septuagenarian machine-shop proprietor who wears a slick of motor oil in lieu of a shirt, sitting in a rattan chair on the five-foot way in front of his shophouse, reading a Chinese newspaper and drinking coffee from a beer glass—and his neighbor, performing tai chi on his own little piece of pavement directly opposite. By the time I return home, the egg store—nothing but eggs, three varieties, six sizes, front door to back and floor to ceiling—across the street has opened its doors and the lottery dealer two houses down has rolled up its metal shutters. Smoke from three sticks of incense stuck upright in a chalice of sand set on the shrine affixed to my neighbor's front pillar is curling through my window bars. Motorcyclists weave through a queue of cars and vegetable vendors pedaling bicycle carts to Chowrasta Market. It's the start of another day in George Town, Penang.



Clockwise from above: Kit Gee Too Watch Repair, Penang Road; tending to an ancestral shrine in a five-foot way on Kimberley Street; fishing near Fort Cornwallis; sepak takraw, or kick-volleyball, livens up an alley; asam laksa in all its sour deliciousness.





THE CRACK OF A
WHIP? THE SIGNAL
THAT A MEDIUM
CALLED IN BY THE
SMALL BUDDHIST
TEMPLE IS ENTERING
A TRANCE





Peninsular George Town pokes out into the Strait of Malacca three kilometers from mainland Malaysia.



Clockwise from top left: A butcher's on Chowrasta Street; a street food hawker flambées *char kway teow* over charcoal on Kimberley Street; where else can you get *char koay kak* (chewy rice cakes) stir-fried in a tire-sized griddle?





Five years ago, I was living in Kuala Lumpur when an assignment sent me to Penang. My husband, David, tagged along and for a week we stayed in a friend's refurbished shophouse in George Town, then less than a year into its status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. We ate incredibly well, at *kopitiam* filled with vendors serving up delicious oyster omelets, *char kway teow*, Penang-style Hokkien *mee* (prawn head-and-pork noodle soup), *nasi kandar*, and coffee with toast and *kaya* (coconut jam). At that time George Town didn't attract many tourists; visitors to Penang stayed up north at the beach. There were no boutique hotels, no cafés serving espresso, no bars or clubs—at least not of the sort that could be described as hip or even welcoming. In early 2009, George Town was fading. Many of its picturesque pre-World War II buildings were decaying or unoccupied. Penang-ites described the city as "dirty" and "dangerous," and after its few remaining old-school restaurants closed their doors around 9 p.m., the streets were empty. At 11 on a Saturday night you could walk George Town's inner city end to end and not encounter a single soul.

I loved it.

For, what George Town lacked in amenities and nightlife, it made up for in something I'd begun to find missing in Kuala Lumpur, as with the progression of Asian cities in which I'd lived in over the previous 15 years: a sense of place. While other urban centers in the region were obliterating their built history in the quest for modernity, George Town wallowed in its glorious trading-post past. Its old street names—Aceh, Melayu, Chulia, Armenian—fêted the multicultural communities of immigrants whose legacies lived on in temples and mosques and churches, not to mention a distinctive fusion cuisine. Street theater—wild processions for religious holidays like Thaipusam and the Nine Emperor Gods Festival, noisy Chinese opera staged for the birthdays of gods housed in clan association temples and offerings burnt by observant Buddhists to appease spirits during Hungry Ghost month and on the first and 15th days of the lunar calendar—was simply a part of daily life, not designed for tourist consumption. Crafts people—tofu and noodle and incense makers, sign painters, tinsmiths and men building big Mercedes and other offerings for departed souls out of paper and wooden sticks—did their work to meet the needs of Penang's consumers, not souvenir hunters.

While parts of Saigon had begun to resemble Bangkok and slices of Kuala Lumpur suggested a Singapore wannabe, no part of George Town could be mistaken for anywhere else in Asia. Or the world.

And so, newly untethered from our base in Kuala Lumpur as David joined me in a freelancing career, we moved to Penang, first to a suburban-ish town on the island's west coast and then, after 20 months of renovations, into a century-old shophouse in the center of George Town. That was almost four years ago. In the interim, George Town has changed immeasurably, and not always agreeably. But its distinctive alloy of pan-national flavors and most of the down-to-earth shopkeepers and residents who form the community around me remains. I've yet to regret our decision to make the leap.

As a traveling writer, I spend a total of only six or seven months of the year on Penang. My rituals of return are well-ingrained: a bowl of *asam laksa* (my favorite Asian dish, not because I'm a Penang booster but because its sour-sweet-fishy-spiciness and fresh garnish of mint, cucumber and pineapple hit all of my culinary highs) from the vendor with the wan moustache and the friendly wife who sets up around 3 p.m. on Weld Quay at the corner of Aceh Street; a walk along

the quieter, less-touristed lanes south of Lebuh Carnarvon in the evening, when the setting sun washes shophouse façades in shades of pink; a dinner of Teochew steamed pomfret with tomatoes, fresh tofu and sour plums, and sambal-fried wing beans at Tek Sen, the best restaurant in George Town and perhaps on the entire island.

Like most anyone anywhere in the world, I suppose, my days at home are fairly routine. But a same-old same-old day in George Town is far from the everyday. Where else can you stop en route to the market (Penang's Chowrasta) for a serving of *char koay kak* (chewy rice cakes stir-fried with dark soy and chili sauces, bean sprouts, Chinese chives, chopped preserved mustard and egg) cooked, with a heart-stopping amount of lard (and a heaping spoonful of cracklings, on request), in a blackened truck-tire-sized griddle set over a wood fire and served in a banana leaf-lined newspaper cone? Where else can you buy a free-range chicken from a singing seller who sports a different hat every day, pork ribs cleaved to order from two brother butchers—one fat and one thin—whose squeaky clean shop has stood for more than 50 years, and the sweetest mangoes from a granny who plucked the fruit from her tree that morning? In what city other than George Town would evening bring the sound of a bell rung by an itinerant vendor of roti or, once in a while, the crack of a whip against pavement—the signal that a medium called in by members of the small Buddhist temple in a nearby alley is entering a trance?

My Penang is, for the most part, George Town. One of the joys of living here is being able to walk or bike to everything I need. But despite its compact, low-rise cityscape, living in George Town can be an intensely urban experience, especially on weekends and holidays. For residents, the city's elevated profile post-UNESCO designation is a double-edged sword, one that I feel most when a touring van parked in front of my house belches exhaust, a gaggle of travelers shelters on my porch during a rain shower, or an eager photographer presses her camera against my window to get a clear shot of my home's interior. Like, I suspect, many of us who live in enviably interesting or beautiful places in this region, I battle a mélange of emotions ranging from pride that my hometown has become a tourist mecca to surliness towards the visitors who trample it.

Luckily, Penang hides pockets of quietude. When I feel the need to escape I head to Balik Pulau, set amidst fruit plantations on the island's west side, where dueling vendors of *asam laksa* and fresh nutmeg juice soured with salted plums face off across the tiny town's main street. After a bite and a stroll, I head straight out of town, past modest old Malay-style timber homes on stilts surrounded by neat gardens draped in bougainvillea, a small workshop where *belacan* (shrimp paste, made elsewhere on the island) is molded into bricks and packed in foil, and on through one of the island's last lingering fishing villages to where the road dead ends at a sliver of clean—and on weekdays at least, usually deserted—white sand facing open sea.

Penang is home, but I know it's not forever. As much as I love George Town's realness—aspects of the city that endure economically and culturally not because of its burgeoning tourism industry but its actual residents—I am keenly aware of its shelf life. When the city stole my heart, it had a solid core of supporters who viewed its UNESCO listing as a potential precipitant for urban renewal, buoyed by the knowledge that livable cities organically attract tourists. That's changed in the last year or two as city and heritage-site leaders have elected to focus instead on the real (or imagined) needs and desires of the growing numbers of visitors.

An avalanche of color in Little India.



**A MAN IS FRYING
CHILI-CLOAKED
CHICKEN... I
BREATHE IN
FRESH PANDAN
AND COCONUT**



T+L Guide

STAY

Sin Keh This stylishly refurbished shophouse and performance space is a hub for George Town's arts community. 105 Malay St.; sinkeh.com; doubles from RM290.

Ren I Tang Bright, comfortable rooms in a former Chinese medicine hall in the middle of Little India. 82A Penang St.; renitang.com; doubles from RM218.

Seven Terraces Spacious

accommodations filled with Peranakan antiques and fitted with luxurious bathrooms, plus a small pool in the center of the heritage site. Stewart Lane; seventerraces.com; doubles from RM550.

EAT

Tek Sen Teochew and Malaysian dishes. Try the *gulai tumis*, pork belly with mustard, and potato leaves fried with *belacan*. 18 Carnavon St.; 60-

12/981-5117; facebook.com/TekSenRestaurant; lunch or dinner for two RM60.

Toh Yuen Dim sum, roast chicken, fish ball soup and noodle dishes in an old Cantonese eatery. 92 Campbell St.; breakfast or lunch for two RM25.

Char Kueh Kak Delicious fried 'carrot' cake from a second-generation hawker. Kimberley Street at Cintra Street; RM3; open daily, 8 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Curry Mee A not-too heavy chicken and coconut soup garnished with fresh mint and slivered torch ginger flower. Keng Kwee Street; RM7; open Thursday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to mid-afternoon.

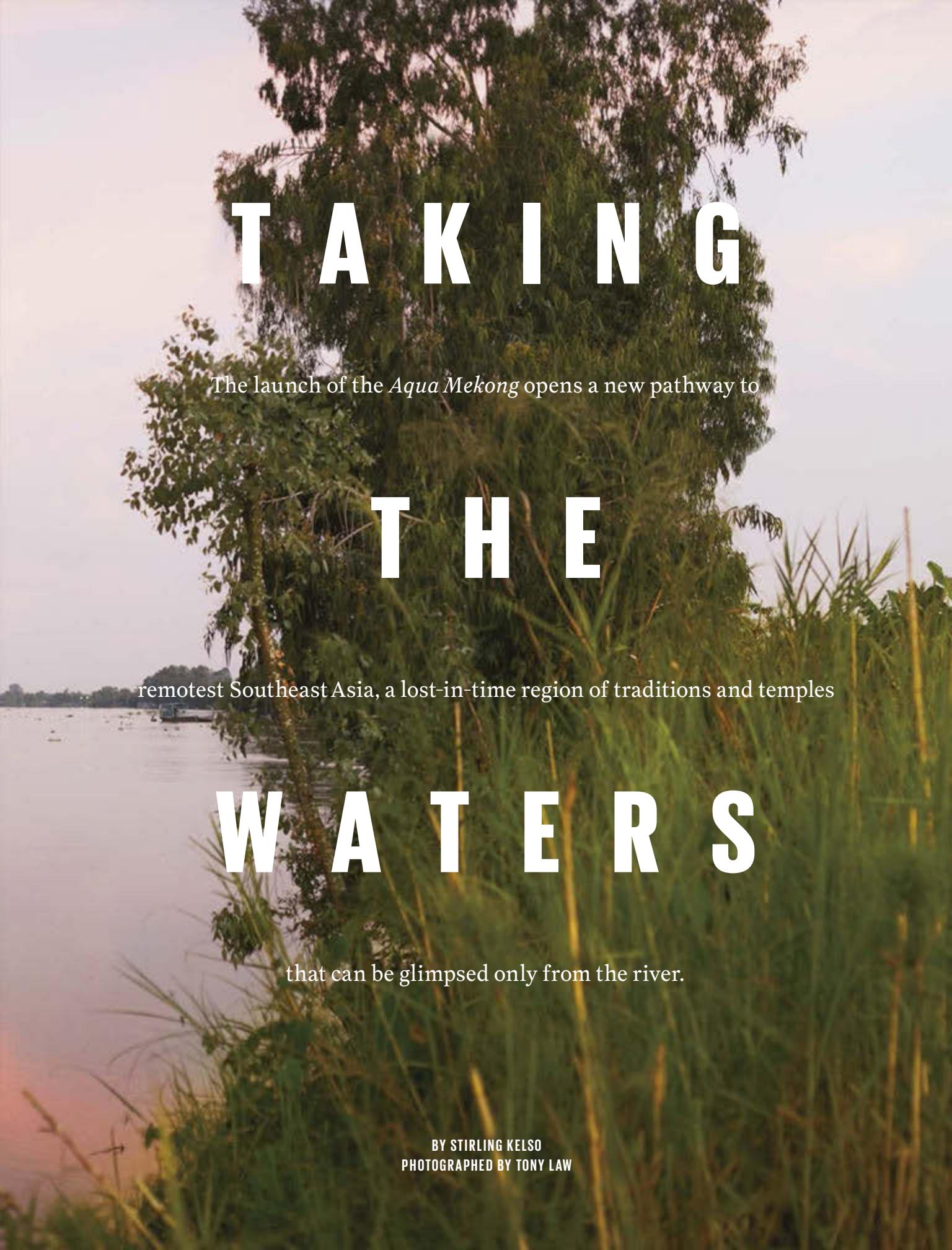
Kim's Asam Laksa Penangites swear by this version of the island's most famous noodle soup. Nan Guang Kopitiam, 67 Main Rd., Balik Pulau; RM5; open daily except Wednesday, 12:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Armenian, the quiet residential street where I stayed during that initial week five years ago, has become a strip of shops peddling kitsch, cafés offering replicas of "famous Penang hawker food," and home to a Saturday night market modeled after Jonker's Walk in Malacca. In the last 12 months, I've watched as at least 20 shophouses within a three-block radius of my home have been emptied of a Taoist temple, families and longstanding businesses, to be turned into boutique hotels. Several years ago, a century-old soy sauce workshop in the city center was evicted from its premises, the owner planning to build a hotel; the still-empty site is now a parking lot. It might not have been paradise to start, but the unique character that initially attracted me to George Town is slowly but surely being leeched away. Every morning my dogs and I walk by George Town's oldest and largest maker of paper effigies. The land beneath the workshop has been sold and the owner expects to be evicted within a few months.

Things change, and that's the hardest part. For me the city would be of little interest without its residents: the bespectacled, snow-white-singlet-wearing man who rides his upright bike to the market every single morning and sits on a stoop across from the Indian-owned, lean-to sundries shop reading the paper every single evening; the corner medicine-shop proprietor on Cintra Street whose friendly, pudgy dog patrols the block like he owns it; my favorite curry *mee* vendor who, kicked out of her street stall spot when a new hotel opened behind her, resurfaced—to my great relief—in a cheerfully painted shophouse elsewhere in town; the stogie-smoking uncle at the tiny bakery 20 paces from my house whose son makes the best double-crusted pineapple tarts in all of Malaysia. As arrestingly beautiful as George Town's unique old buildings are, it's memories of encounters with the people who inhabit them that will stay with me when I leave. +



TAKING



The launch of the *Aqua Mekong* opens a new pathway to

THE

remotest Southeast Asia, a lost-in-time region of traditions and temples

WATERS

that can be glimpsed only from the river.

BY STIRLING KELSO
PHOTOGRAPHED BY TONY LAW



Curious eyes followed us as we trekked under tamarind trees on a dirt path that traced the shore of the Mekong River. With villagers watching expectantly, we turned to enter the gates of a 19th-century mansion, a beautifully decaying French-Vietnamese pile near Cai Be. At that moment, a shirtless old man emerged, confused, then began to laugh. "You didn't tell me you were coming," he chided our guide, Yee Nguyen, in Vietnamese, throwing on a loose polo shirt. The owner of this architectural relic, it turned out, was Nguyen's uncle. I couldn't imagine what the jocular 80-year-old was thinking—with our global group of Italians, Mexicans, Americans, Australians and French, it's like the UN showed up at his door—and we were equally surprised to be standing in his living room. A behind-the-scenes tour of this fresco-lined house wasn't on the day's agenda, but I'd already come to expect the unexpected on day two of this five-day trip, the inaugural upriver cruise with *Aqua Expeditions* through Vietnam and Cambodia.

Owned by Italian-American entrepreneur Francesco Galli Zugaro, *Aqua* has already made a name for itself with its two luxury vessels on the Peruvian Amazon. When customers began clamoring for an *Aqua* three-peat, Galli Zugaro moved his family to Singapore and, within two years, launched a Mekong river ship with three-, four-, and seven-night itineraries between Saigon and Siem Reap. (I was on a four-night sailing upriver from Saigon to Phnom Penh.)

His timing couldn't be better. According to the luxury travel-advisor consortium *Virtuoso*, more than 20 percent of all cruise bookings are now for river ships. Still, there has been more demand than supply. *Aqua Mekong* distinguishes itself by its size (only 40 passengers), its cuisine, from executive chef David Thompson, who hails from Bangkok's revered Nahm restaurant; and the access it provides. An impromptu visit with our guide's uncle was just one of many transporting adventures we had during our cruise, allowing a perspective on rural Asia that until now had been all but inaccessible to travelers.

Three-night cruises from US\$3,315 per person, based on double occupancy; aquaexpeditions.com.

DAYS 4-5 Phnom Penh area. Distance traveled: 19 nautical miles.

ARTISAN CRAFTS AND THE COUNTRYSIDE

When we toured Koh Dach, just outside of Phnom Penh, we saw women dyeing threads and weaving fine scarves on three-pedaled looms [1]. They were reviving an art form banned under the Khmer Rouge. Our group went to the small village of Okna, where we cycled around brick-making factories, temples and rice farms. White oxen, the preferred mode of transportation, waded in the river, and around the thatch and wood houses. On the following day, we disembarked from Phnom Penh.

DAY 3 Tan Chau to Phnom Penh. Distance traveled: 62 nautical miles.

LONGANS, GASOLINE AND SAFFRON-ROBED MONKS

As the *Aqua Mekong* bobbed alongside tankers and fishing boats waiting to cross the border, we jumped ship to explore the Vietnamese city of Chau Doc [4]. At the local market [3-4], residents bartered for clusters of tangy longans and bitter winter melons; smuggled cigarettes (cheap in Vietnam) and liter Coke bottles filled with gasoline (cheap in Cambodia) changed hands clandestinely. Eventually we traded the chaos for the solemnity of the intimate Long Son Tu Temple, high up on Sam Mountain, the region's tallest peak.

VINH XUONG

DAY 3

TAN CHAU/CHAU DOC

THE JOURNEY

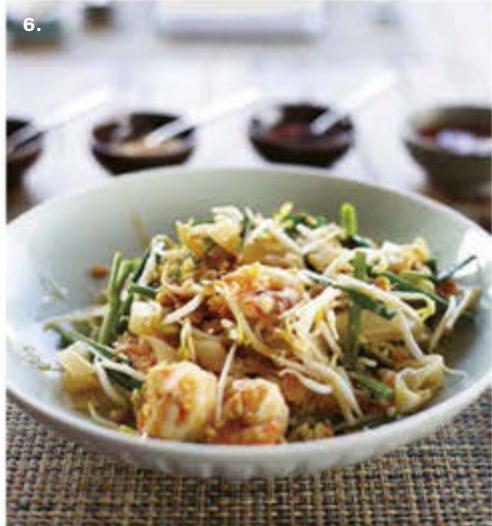
DAYS 1-2 Bus ride 72 kilometers from Saigon to My Tho. Cruise to Cai Be, Binh Thanh and Tan Chau. Distance traveled: 83 nautical miles.

WEAVING AMONG OVERWATER MARKETS

Even on the first full day, our excursions began well before dawn, with four private skiffs taking us into narrow channels that zigzagged among single-room

houseboats in Cai Be. There, villagers advertised market goods—canary-yellow jackfruit, bumpy durians, sun-dried cassava—on bamboo flagpoles. After a lunch of scallops with caramelized peanuts and stir-fried pork and eggplant on the ship,

we toured the fishing village of Binh Thanh (some on the ships' bikes, which are first come, first served), where houses with open courtyards lifted a curtain on the everyday. Another stop: temples in Sa Dec [2].



THE SHIP

On the inaugural upriver journey, a handful of features still needed fine-tuning—no water in the pool, a broken toilet handle—but the vessel has since shed its training fins. The location of the spa near the engine room notwithstanding, the *Aqua Mekong's* intuitive features and modern Italian style make it the river's front-runner. It has only 20 staterooms (compared with the usual 40-plus), all equal in size at 30 square meters, giving them a 4-plus-square-meter advantage over other ships' standard rooms. The contemporary spaces are outfitted with teak furnishings, Nespresso machines and high-pressure rain showers. All rooms have floor-to-ceiling windows, and eight have glassed-in balconies [5].

Executive chef David Thompson supplements his Southeast Asian-influenced dishes [6] with produce picked up in markets along the water. His occasional Italian spread is a refreshing break from the native cuisine. House beer and wine is already included, and at an additional US\$8, a cocktail won't break the bank. The Salted Watermelon Crush, made with Sipsmith Barley Vodka and Thai basil, is a standout. +



SYDNEY
TOKYO
LONDON
ISTANBUL
HONG KONG
LOS ANGELES
PHILADELPHIA
MEXICO CITY
NEW YORK
COPENHAGEN
SÃO PAULO



THE BEST NEW RESTAURANTS

ELEVEN OF THE WORLD'S MOST COMPELLING FOOD CAPITALS, WHERE NEO-TRADITIONALISTS, UPSTART ICONOCLASTS AND INGREDIENT OBSESSIVES ARE SETTING NEW CULINARY STANDARDS.

BY ANYA VON BREMSEN, WITH ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY CÍNTIA BERTOLINO, JANICE LEUNG HAYES, PAT NOURSE AND ROBBIE SWINNERTON • EDITED BY JENNIFER FLOWERS





A cabbage-topped chicken katsu at Ivan Ramen, on New York City's Lower East Side. **Opposite:** The kitchen at Ivan Ramen.



At Cho Cho
San, in Sydney.
Opposite:
Roast duck
at La Bonne
Table, in Tokyo.

SYDNEY

DOWN UNDER, UNPLUGGED

► Australia's largest metropolis may have a reputation for the big, the obvious and the showy, but the city's restaurants have recently taken a turn toward the small, the unusual and the understated. Mitch Orr, an alumnus of Italy's vaunted Osteria Francescana, creates house-made pastas at **ACME** and prepares them in ways your *nonna* never imagined. That might mean linguine given a wok-like scorch with black garlic and burnt chilies or Filipino-inspired vinegar-tangy pork topped with a raw yolk and paired with immaculate hand-cut macaroni. In Redfern, a neighborhood on the rise, Eun Hee An and Ben Sears have traded the white tablecloths of their fine-dining backgrounds for spare furnishings and concrete floors at **MOON PARK**.

What the restaurant may lack in design it more than makes up for with its witty reimagining of Korean cuisine. Is that a glimmer of Scandinavia in that *ssäm* wrap of smoked eel and puffed rice presented on a nasturtium leaf? Or in the classic *pajeon* pancake topped by tufts of mackerel "floss"?

In another nod to the Far East, the rambunctious, *izakaya*-inspired **CHO CHO SAN** is Sydney's love letter to Japan: chef Nic Wong's lamb cutlets are spiked with sancho pepper, and the gingery *tataki* is made with prime Australian beef. Sydney's go-to restaurant of the moment is inarguably

ESTER, a low-key spot where Mat Lindsay coaxes morsels of surprising elegance and originality from his wood-fired oven: lobster sausage on steamed bread updates the classic Aussie sausage sandwich with great success, not least when it's paired with Si Vintners' lovely pale Pinot Noir Rosé.

- WEAREACME.COM.AU; A\$65
- MOON-PARK.COM.AU; A\$65
- CHOCHOSAN.COM.AU; A\$100
- ESTER-RESTAURANT.COM.AU; A\$100



TETSUYA MIURA, OPPOSITE: COURTESY OF CHO CHO SAN



TOKYO

NEXT-GEN RENEGADES

► With new takes on the best of Japan, all in surprisingly casual surrounds, Tokyo's young chefs are shaking things up. Take Shinobu Namae, graduate of Fat Duck, whose minimalist bistro **LA BONNE TABLE** dares to serve simple vegetables plucked just in time from a nearby organic farm. Or, 28-year-old Jun Takahashi's ground-breaking chill cult favorite **SUSHI TAKAHASHI**, in Ginza, with unimpeachable *nigiri* and creative plates of crab steamed in its shell. Slurp tagliatelle-sized noodles in an *uni*-infused dipping broth at the seafood-driven ramen haven **GONOKAMI SUISAN**. It seems everyone is obsessively aging their Wagyu these days, but none is doing it richer or better than deli **SAKANA NO NAKASEI**. Sixty-day-aged Wagyu "ham" or pastrami, artisanal sake, steaks? Yes, please.

- LABONNETABLE.JP; PRIX FIXE ¥6,800 PER PERSON
- SUSHI TAKAHASHI; 1-14-14 GINZA; SET MENU FROM ¥12,000 PER PERSON
- GONOKAMI SUISAN; 2-9-6 KANDA TACHO; ¥1,560
- NAKA-SEI.COM/UCHI; SET MENU FROM ¥7,500 PER PERSON



The bar at Fera, in Claridge's hotel, in London. **Opposite, from left:** Outside Little Bao, in Hong Kong; Istanbul's Ristorante Italia.

► London's latest crop of restaurants continues to bolster the city's bid for world food domination. **LYLE'S**, in Shoreditch, is a light-filled industrial space with charming service and an interesting, affordable wine list. But what won us over was the creativity of 35-year-old chef-owner James Lowe, whose nightly set menu might feature a salad of emerald peas and Ticklemore goat cheese scattered with pea flowers or succulent crayfish nestled on samphire. In a wood-paneled room in Mayfair, **GYMKHANA**—inspired by Raj-era gentlemen's sporting clubs—is both nostalgic and fresh. Think esoteric curries, like suckling-pig vindaloo or stunning biryani steamed under a pastry dome. Less than a kilometer north, hotel dining got a jolt when Simon Rogan, one of the U.K.'s most exciting chefs, opened **FERA** inside Claridge's. Beautiful evocations of the British *terroir* arrive on handmade ceramic dishes: a rabbit croquette with lovage emulsion, a foamy nasturtium sauce accenting hake steamed inside caramelized cabbage. Over in Soho, the **PALOMAR** is a collaboration between the restaurateurs behind Machneyuda, Jerusalem's hottest table, and a cool London DJ. We adore the exuberant Israeli-Palestinian ways with charred eggplants, salmon sashimi, yogurt, tahini and pomegranates. And how not to love the feathery Yemenite bread called *kubaneh*—or the spirited atmosphere. "Make me happy," we heard Tomer Amedi, the Kurdish-Jewish head chef, shout to his staff, "and hurry up that pork-belly tagine."

- LYLESLONDON.COM; SET MENU FROM £39 PER PERSON
- GYMKHANALONDON.COM; £60
- FERAATCLARIDGES.CO.UK; £80
- THEPALOMAR.CO.UK; £40

THINK GLOBAL,
COOK LOCAL

LONDON



EURASIAN FUSION

ISTANBUL

► This megalopolis has always charmed us with its mix of waterside fish restaurants, smoky kebab joints and drinking dens known as *meyhanes* serving sumptuous meze. But lately, local chefs and glamorous out-of-towners alike have been invigorating the restaurant scene. Massimo Bottura, Italy's most famous chef, debuted his first outpost, **RISTORANTE ITALIA**, at the posh Zorlu shopping center. Instead of reprising hits from his avant-garde Osteria Francescana in Modena, the chef presents thoughtful distillations of pan-Italian classics: an osso buco cooked at a super-low temperature for 25 hours with bone marrow enriching the sauce, or a deconstructed tiramisu so light it practically floats off the table. Off frenetic Istiklal Street, tile-clad **YENİ LOKANTA** is the modern *meyhane* of the moment. We're dazzled by chef Civan Er's small plates, updated with heirloom foodstuffs like "burnt" Denizli yogurt atop green beans, walnut-studded *sucuk* sausage, and beef ribs roasted in a wood-burning oven. And in the gentrifying Balat district, Turkish film director Ezel Akay has resurrected the iconic 125-year-old **AGORA MEYHANESİ**, where raki flows once again and the herb- and pomegranate-laced salads, flash-fried petals of liver, and sizzling squid set a new standard for meze.



● RISTORANTEITALIA.COM.TR; TRY200 ● LOKANTAYENI.COM; TRY420 ● AGORAMEYHANESİ.COM; TRY90

HONG KONG



CLASSICS REVISITED

► Until recently, big-name international chefs set the standard for innovation in Hong Kong. But that's changing now that homegrown talent has begun reviving the city's culinary traditions. At the 20-seat **LITTLE BAO**, May Chow remakes local comfort food. The humble steamed bun becomes a pork-belly slider spiced with cinnamon, and mac and cheese comes as *cheung fan* (rice paper rolls) laced with cod roe. Join the cool kids around the corner at **HO LEE FOOK**, where chef Jowett Yu sends out surprising remixes of pan-Asian dishes from his mah-jongg-tiled open kitchen: a brined barbecue goose, roasted for hours in a traditional oven, and delightfully charred Wagyu short ribs with house-made shallot kimchi. Cantonese cuisine takes a luxurious turn at **MOTT 32**, a chic subterranean space in the financial district. Chef Fung Man Yip dishes up caviar-topped shrimp *siu mai* with soft-boiled quail eggs in the center and

textbook-perfect, applewood-roasted Peking duck. Purists are flocking to **SEVENTH SON**, opened by a scion of the family behind the venerable Fook Lam Moon (known as the "tycoon's canteen"). The stylishly restrained dining room serves Cantonese mainstays without the cliquey, clublike vibe—all the better for savoring the suckling pig, with its addictively crisp skin, and the ethereal deep-fried taro dumplings.

● LITTLE-BAO.COM; HK\$450 ● HOLEEFOOK.COM.HK; HK\$500

● MOTT32.COM; HK\$500 ● SEVENTHSON.HK; HK\$1,500



Sous-chef Ashkan Ghassemzadeh serves up house-made fettuccine at République, in Los Angeles. **Opposite:** A black bialy topped with whitefish at High Street on Market, in Philadelphia.

TINSELTOWN'S
RISING STARS

L.A.

What was your last great meal? Show us on Twitter or Instagram by using the hashtag **#TLAsia** for the chance to be featured in the magazine..

► The Los Angeles food revolution that kicked off a few years ago is gathering strength, powered by unrivaled California produce, daring young chefs, a United Nations of ethnic cuisines, and, yes, a dash of Hollywood glamour. While most TV celebrity chefs are peddling overpriced comfort food, Curtis Stone, the Australian heartthrob of *Top Chef Masters* fame, has caused a sensation with his thoughtful and utterly original **MAUDE**, in Beverly Hills. In the chic, rustic space, Stone presents multicourse market menus themed around a single ingredient. Fall pears show up as "snow" atop briny oysters and as a gelée highlighting a veal cheek; in winter he celebrates citrus with tangerine-glazed chicken terrine. We love the tables, set with vintage silver and china and inspired by the kitchen of Curtis's own grandmother, Maude. Among the city's rising stars: Kris Yenbamroong, the Thai wunderkind with an NYU film degree, who counted the likes of René Redzepi and Wylie Dufresne among fans of his pop-up dinners. At **NIGHT & MARKET SONG**, his permanent Silver Lake digs (both spare and ironically garish), he presents hyper-vivid, authentic northern Thai dishes like grilled pork neck with a bracingly spicy *jaew* chili dip, and *hor ab*, an intensely aromatic tamale of catfish and pork fat in a banana-leaf bundle. Along La Brea Avenue, the soaring 1929 building that housed onetime celebrity haunt Campanile has been reborn as the even more gorgeous **RÉPUBLIQUE**. Headed by Walter and Margarita Manzke, the brasserie stays open around the clock, whether for an early-morning blood-orange brioche or a late-night negroni blanc, scrambled eggs with sea urchin on toast, and the best *frites* west of Paris.

- MAUDERESTAURANT.COM; PRIX FIXE
FROM US\$90 PER PERSON
- NIGHTMARKETLA.COM; US\$60
- REPUBLICUELA.COM; US\$120



PHILADELPHIA

AMERICA'S NEXT GREAT FOOD CITY

► This unsung destination has blossomed into one of the U.S.'s most exciting restaurant cities—Portland East?—with a fierce indie spirit and world-class kitchen talent. Peter Serpico, a veteran of New York City's Momofuku Ko, wowed us at his namesake **SERPICO** with asparagus in garlicky pecorino broth and the now-famous pig's head with burnt-onion mustard. If it's comfort food you're after, Michael Solomonov and Steve Cook (whose Zahav and Federal Donuts revitalized Sanson Street) opened two adjacent places, both equally worthy of attention. Inspired by the *hummusiyas* of Israel, the color-splashed **DIZENGOFF** is where earthy chickpea purées reach the stratosphere—especially when topped with heirloom zucchini and *za'atar*. Next door at **ABE FISHER**, co-chef Yehuda Sichel spins deliciously irreverent riffs on the foods of the Jewish diaspora ("borscht" is a beet tartare garnished with jewel-like trout roe). Another New York transplant, Eli Kulp (formerly of Torrisi), made sparks with his remake of the Fork three years ago. **HIGH STREET ON MARKET** is its relaxed, more experimental sibling—the artisanal breads and the caraway-rye rigatoni with pastrami *ragù* are reasons alone to go to Philly.

- SERPICOONSOUTH.COM; US\$80
- DIZENGOFFPHILLY.COM; US\$20
- ABEFISHERPHILLY.COM; PRIX FIXE US\$39 PER PERSON
- HIGHSTREETONMARKET.COM; US\$80



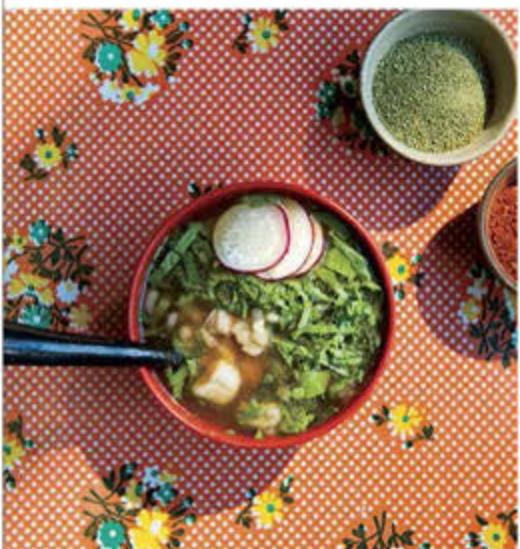
MEXICO CITY

FOOD MECCA ON THE RISE

Ever since the avant-garde fireworks at restaurants like Quintonil and Pujol established Mexico City as one of the world's top food destinations, the D.F. has been looking inward, with humbler cooking that explores the country's own food traditions. Alejandro Ruiz, the powerhouse chef from Oaxaca who revitalized that region's food scene, opened **GUZINA OAXACA** in Polanco. His menu is both anthropological and sensual, with dishes like *caldo de piedra*, a pre-Hispanic shrimp soup cooked over hot river rocks and perfumed with anise-*y hoja santa* and epazote. In gentrifying Zona Rosa, behind the cheery turquoise façade of **DE MAR A MAR**, seafood whisked in from Baja and Puerto Ángel is the star of the menu devised by Pujol-trained Eduardo García. Everything at this lovable urban beach shack is so tasty it's impossible to stop ordering more sashimiesque tuna *laminado* and sweet battered shrimp folded into hand-patted tortillas. To try everything that's going on in the city at once, head to Colonia Roma. It's a blast perching on stools and sampling from each kitchen at **MERCADO ROMA**: chili-intensive pozole from José Guadalupe, a stew of pristine Pacific coast clams and chorizo from La Ahumadora, and La Barraca Valenciana's squid *torta* with garlicky mayo created by El Bulli veteran José Miguel García.

● GUZINAOAXACA.COM; M\$900 ● DEMARAMAR.MX; M\$800

● MERCADOROMA.COM; PRICES VARY PER STALL





CHRISTOPHER TESTANI (2), OPPOSITE: ADAM WISEMAN (2)

Though the city's high-voltage restaurant scene assures thrills for all wallets and moods, our favorites now are places with focused menus and big personalities. Downtown glamour meets uptown polish—with nostalgic echoes of Mitteleuropa—at **BÂTARD**, from über-host Drew Nieporent and Austrian chef Markus Glocker. An octopus "pastrami," bewitched into a Gaudí-like mosaic terrine, and hand-pulled strudel filled with apples, raisins and sweetbreads are among Glocker's assured neoclassical dishes. Having first triumphed in Tokyo, the Long Island-born noodle master Ivan Orkin set up the lively **IVAN RAMEN** on Clinton Street, where he creates witty Japanese-American mash-ups like Amish-scrappling waffles masquerading as *okonomiyaki* pancakes. Which dish wins? It's a toss-up between the triple-garlic, triple-pork *mazemen*, with compulsively slurpable whole-wheat noodles, and the rye-enriched ramen in a sinus-clearing red-chili broth. In the East Village, **HUERTAS**, a Basque gem from two young veterans of the Danny Meyer hospitality school, seduced us with its enticing tapas—plush *jamón croquetas*, adorable shrimp-and-egg canapés—as well as chef Jonah Miller's tasting menu, with its earthy-sweet pairing of cockles and wild mushrooms, and suckling pig served with an Asturian bean-and-chorizo stew. Meanwhile, Danny Meyer himself has an instant classic, the new Roman-themed **MARTA**. It's the convivial scene behind the long marble counter that wooed us, along with the wafer-thin pizzas and perfectly grilled lamb chops. And isn't it nice to bond with a stranger over glasses of Fruilian Ribola Gialla?

• BATARDTRIBECA.COM; PRIX FIXE FROM US\$55 PER PERSON • IVANRAMEN.COM; US\$55

• HUERTASNYC.COM; PRIX FIXE FROM US\$55 PER PERSON • MARTAMANHATTAN.COM; US\$100

NEW YORK



SMALL IS
THE NEW BIG



Clockwise from top left: Mercado Roma, in Mexico City; Bâtard's dining room, in New York City; octopus "pastrami" at Bâtard; chili-infused pozole soup at José Guadalupe, in the Mercado Roma.

COPENHAGEN

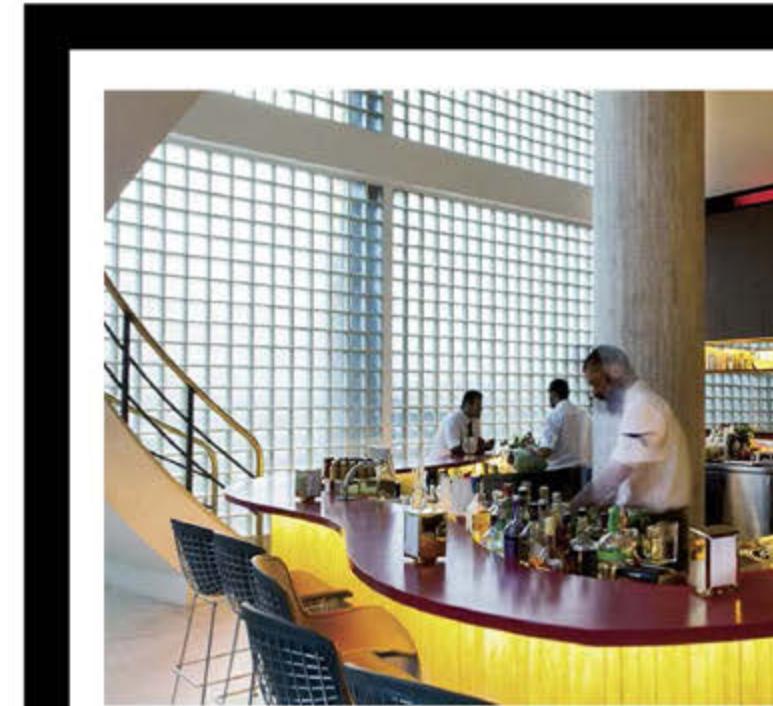
NEW NORDIC 2.0



► The epicenter of the Scandinavian food revolution and hometown of Noma is already Europe's culinary capital. But Copenhagen doesn't rest on its laurels, and René Redzepi's alumni continue to evolve. At the Modernist **ØL & BRØD**, from cult Mikeller microbrewery, the chef spins *smørrebrød*—the iconic open-faced sandwich—into degustation menus with buttery beef tartare with black-currant powder or a mélange of confited and pickled wild mushrooms under a runny smoked egg yolk. The high-minded **STUDIO** at the Standard, Claus Meyer's waterside complex, got its first Michelin star just months after opening. In the open-kitchen dining room, you'll find Torsten Vildgaard, Noma's longtime test-kitchen director, arranging a single perfect scallop (marinated in white-currant juice) on juniper branches or dolloping crème anglaise onto carrot-and-sea-buckthorn sorbet. **UFORMEL** ups the cosmopolitan factor with a striking black-and-gold room and creative small plates, like turbot ceviche with the fruity, acidic kick of green strawberries. And with **BAEST**, Sicilian-Norwegian maestro Christian Puglisi (of Relæ and Manfreds, and formerly of Noma) has given the city a jolt of Italian. Divinely charred pizzas emerge from the Neapolitan oven, mozzarella is made from biodynamic milk in the upstairs dairy, and spicy house-cured salumi, like *'nduja* and *coppiette*, are the Danish Hindsholm pig's proudest moment.

- OLOGBROD.COM; KR700
- THESTANDARDCPH.DK; PRIX FIXE FROM KR900 PER PERSON
- UFORMEL.DK; PRIX FIXE FROM KR750 PER PERSON
- BAEST.DK; PRIX FIXE FROM KR325 PER PERSON

Above, from left:
The Midcentury Modernist-inspired dining room at Øl & Brød, in Copenhagen.; São Paulo's historic Riviera Bar, revitalized with a new menu by chef Alex Atala.



SÃO PAULO

BACK TO ITS ROOTS

► Brazil's global food capital is trading avant-garde approaches for hearty simplicity. For a decade, Rodrigo Oliveira has been drawing well-heeled Paulistas with a faultless African-inspired menu at Mocotó, his humble family canteen in rough-and-tumble Villa Madeiro. At his follow-up next door, **ESQUINA MOCOTÓ**, he elevates even the most rustic dishes in his repertoire: rice and beans become ethereal risotto, and the *carne-de-sol*, or salt-cured beef, is so tender it practically melts in your mouth. In the posh Jardins neighborhood, Alex Atala, Brazil's most celebrated culinary star (D.O.M., *Dalva e Dito*), has paired up with club impresario Facundo Guerra to deliver the ultimate late-night dining menu at **RIVIERA BAR**. In the historic lounge, live jazz and beautiful people set the scene for dishes like Atala's definitive steak parmesan with fries, or a hearty roast-beef sandwich. In gallery-lined Vila Madalena, the simple menu at **TUJU** belies the vibrant showcase of regional flavors and ingredients by chef Ivan Ralston: velvety pork cheek with a sweet-potato purée, spaghetti tossed with hearts of palm and topped with local crayfish, and apple pie served alongside ice cream sweetened with the delicate honey of native Mandaçai bees. +

- ESQUINAMOCOTO.COM.BR; R\$140
- RIVIERABAR.COM.BR; R\$110
- TUJU.COM.BR; TASTING MENU FROM R\$210 PER PERSON



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Marina Beach, in eastern Chennai. **Opposite:** Street vendors in Kanchipuram, about 72 kilometers southwest of Chennai.

Passage to Chennai

ON A JOURNEY TO SOUTHERN INDIA, **GINI ALHADEF** PAYS A VISIT TO THE SPIRITUAL HEART OF THE COUNTRY, WHERE EVERY COLORFUL SARI AND MESMERIZING MUSICAL PHRASE IS A FORM OF DEVOTION.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY
TrujilloPaumier

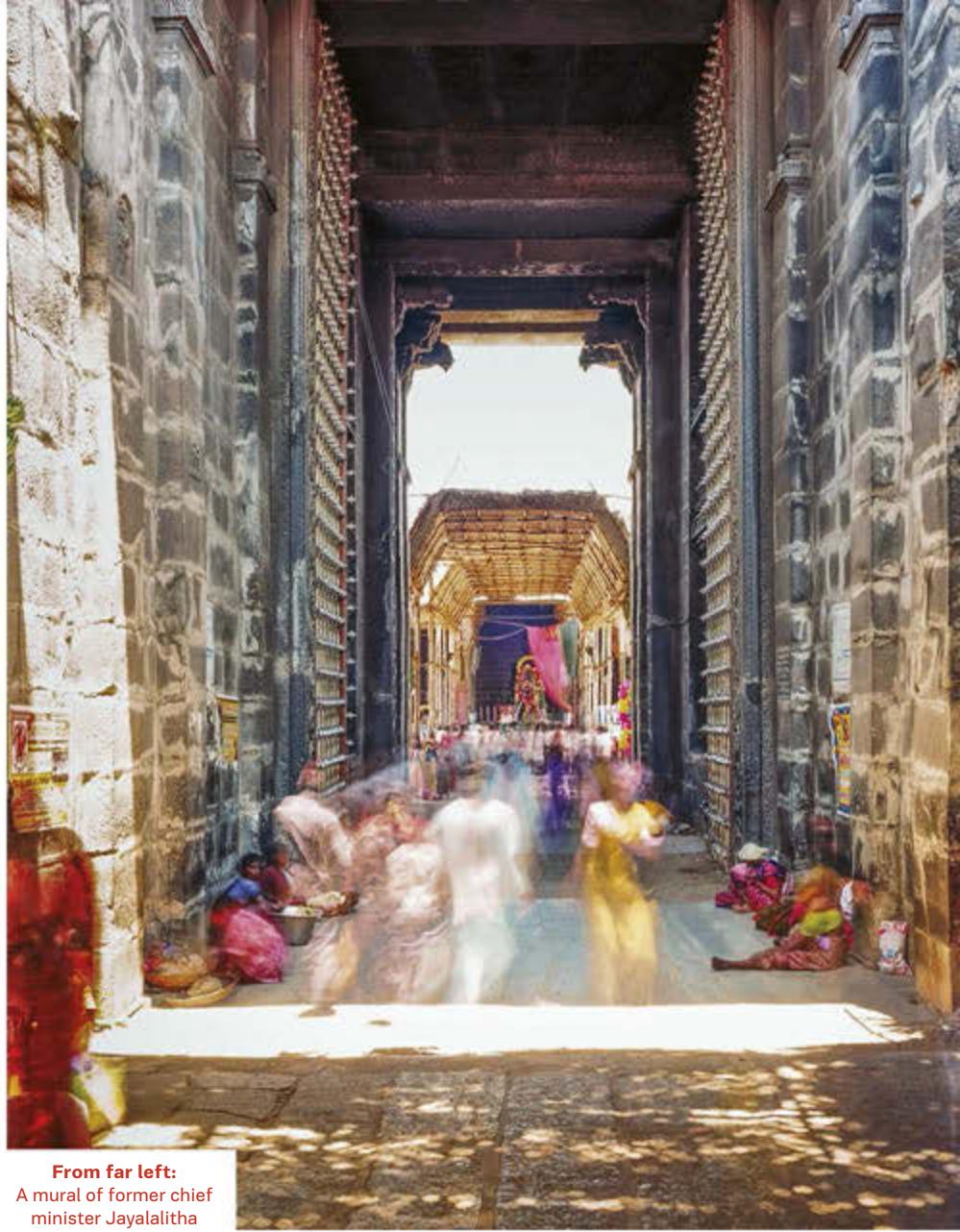


The *idli* welcomes me into the day like a slightly flattened moon that has landed on my plate. You could rest your cheek on it, but the best thing is to feel its porous warm surface on your tongue, to savor its innocent taste. Seven to 10 centimeters in diameter, the *idli*, a steamed cake traditionally eaten at breakfast, has tiny shallow craters over its surface where the batter has bubbled. What does it taste of? Of soft dough. It comes with coconut chutney—fresh grated with a bit of chili—and *sambar*, a spicy stew made with tamarind, lentils and spices. The *idli* to me is emblematic of the purity I often encounter in the city of Chennai.

Though it's India's fourth largest city, and an important center for industry and film, Chennai is a place of invisible charms. Its appeal can't be photographed—you feel it rather

than see it. Anchored in an ancient culture of devotion, the Dravidian, this place has always felt to me more Indian than any other part of India I've been to. The atmosphere of devotion is palpable practically everywhere in the city—it is Chennai's central attraction. No matter how new the venture, or how commercial, it seems to enter a force field of all the Hindu gods and avatars prayed to in southern India.

While having breakfast, I looked out the window of my hotel, the Raintree, and saw a woman in a sari sweeping the road. Just then the phone rang and the concierge said, "Your car has reported, Madam." This sentence transported me to some grand estate from the 1920's. It was Madras then, not Chennai. The names of streets have since



From far left:
A mural of former chief minister Jayalalitha Jayaram; Leela Palace; a street in Kanchipuram.

changed from being decidedly British to not-British, after independence, but the old names and numbers remain on houses and shops because they are the ones still remembered. Mount Road, where you'll find the city's newest and most impressive hotels—the ITC Grand Chola and the Raintree—is now Anna Salai.

I was to spend just over a week in Chennai, and thanks to a friend who had left for Delhi, I had a pass to the Madras Music Academy's yearly festival. The performers came and sat cross-legged on a dais behind dense rows of tropical flowers for two, sometimes three hours. The player of the mridangam—an oblong drum held sideways across the knees—readjusted the cloth beneath his instrument from time to time and shifted his legs and feet when tuning it. Carnatic, as the music of South India is known (as opposed to the more melodic Hindustani kind, from

the north), does not “transport”—it leaves you where you are, in an ecstatic present. It is made of gurgling sung improvisations, and the violin, held with the scroll pointed toward the floor, exactly mimics every virtuosic melody improvised by the singer.

While listening, I gazed at the saris—Kanchi silks, Bengali muslins, and the newer jute saris. I looked at the way gentlemen wore their dhotis, whether they had a dark mark on the side of their ankle where the foot rested on the ground from all the time spent sitting cross-legged. Some men beat the back of their hand, then the palm, on their knee to keep rhythm and as a sign of appreciation. Occasionally, I took a break for some “tiffin”—a light cooked meal such as *vadai*, savory miniature doughnuts, or *pongal*, a mixture of rice and mung bean dal—on a fresh green banana leaf.



Near Kapaleeswarar Temple. **Opposite:**
A traditional dancer.

At the gate to the academy, an unadorned white volume, there were stylized marigolds drawn in rice flour on the asphalt along either side of the road that are meticulously retraced once a day by hand. These designs are on many South Indian thresholds. Such quiet displays of devotion are an antidote to the chaos of Chennai. But there is no hurry here, only a hallmark Indian swiftness. And the most basic wares at a street stall look like offerings in a temple: piles of limes, rows of knapsacks, unfurled synthetic saris, yellow and red soccer balls, hanging paper stars, and purple and orange packets of snacks by the yard hanging from strings are as good as flower garlands. Even a row of gray plastic tubing takes on an ornamental perfection. Everything is a shrine, everything is an altar.

At Radha Gold Jewellers, in Mylapore, Chennai's oldest neighborhood, there were "dance jewels, temple jewels."

These are the adornments made of gold, pearls and stones worn around the hairline, or as dangling earpieces shaped like carousels, by dancers of *bharata natyam*, a classical Indian form once practiced by initiates within temple compounds. I was given a calendar with a picture of the voluptuous goddess Lakshmi on a Bazooka-pink lotus pasted on a stiff board. She wore a grass-green sari edged in gold, a gold necklace and headpiece.

One local form of sightseeing might be called "saint-seeing." I couldn't help gazing at all the pictures not only of gods and goddesses but also of human sages whose photographs hang in offices, shops and homes, usually placed high above doorways and cornices. There is the Turkish Mira Alfassa in her spangled chiffon saris; the guru Sri Aurobindo, with his mad stare and long white beard; and Ramana, with his doe eyes, plain loincloth, and narrow,

IT WAS AS THOUGH A
MASS OF SEVERAL
HUNDRED PEOPLE
COULD BEHAVE AS
ONE. I SUDDENLY SAW
THE MANY-HEADED
GODS AND GODDESSES
AS AN EXPRESSION OF
A COMMUNITY WITH A
SINGLE PURPOSE



almost feminine shoulders. They look straight into the camera and their eyes do something no lighting designer could ever explain or duplicate: they seem to travel out of the frame to look into yours.

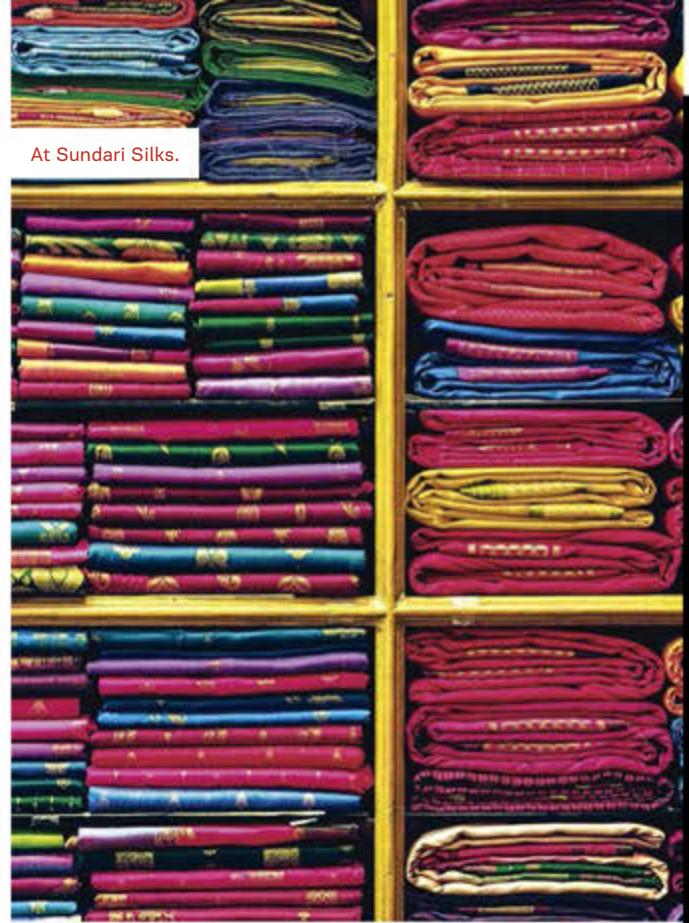
The guide who accompanied me around the Madhava Perumal Temple in Mylapore told me that the stone used to make an idol is just a stone but that not unlike the blank paper that is put through a printer and comes out as currency at the other end, when that stone is prayed to, and chanted over, for years, even centuries, it becomes charged.

That must be true of these saints, too, since they were once only human. Then he explained the symbolism of *prasad*, or offerings: to offer a coconut, for instance, is to say, "My heart is as black and rough as this coconut but if you crack it, the inside is white and soft. Please make me like that." In the course of the visit I was offered marigolds, pink roses, red kumkum powder.

One day, I was wandering down Chamiers Road when I came upon a Ganesha temple the size of a pantry. I approached: beyond a red-and-white-striped entrance was a Ganesha decorated with a piece of gold fabric around his neck, a hibiscus between his feet, incense burning around him. How could any god resist such tender treatment?

That afternoon, I found myself at the Kapaleeswarar Temple. It was sundown, people were beginning to stream in. There was no hurry, no pushing, no crowding. It was as though a mass of several hundred people could behave as one. I suddenly saw the many-headed and many-armed gods and goddesses as an expression of a community with a single purpose. The women wore their best saris. Some had jasmine blossoms woven into thick braids down their back. The men, especially the older ones, many Brahman priests among them, wore white dhotis edged in gold or red or yellow, and their foreheads were smeared with sandalwood paste—a three-pronged design reminiscent of a tuning fork. I admired a gentleman's ingenious way of fixing the broken temple of his eyeglasses with string so that it looked as though a worm had wound its way around it, and another's purple and white polka-dot earmuffs, perhaps a protection against the loud drums around us.

By one shrine to Nandi the bull, thought to be the vehicle of Lord Shiva, to whom this temple is dedicated, women lined up, and when they reached the crouching black beast, leaned over, or knelt, cupped its ear with their hands and whispered into it, as with endearments to a loved one. Their prayers may have been for fertility or to ask Nandi to inform his master of their visit. A much larger Nandi had been taken out of its shrine and was carried on a palanquin by 16 men. Their movement created a vast shifting current in the crowd. Right above one corner of the temple was a monumental fluorescent rendition of the recently ousted chief minister of Tamil Nadu state, Jayalalitha Jayaram, her distinctive silhouette in a sari, hands joined in a *namaste*. It lit up a corner of the sky in blues, reds and greens. *



T+L Guide India



Getting There

Fly direct from Singapore into Chennai via several airlines, including **Singapore Airlines** (singaporeair.com), **Tigerair** (tigerair.com), **Jet Airways** (jetairways.com) and **Indigo** (book.goindigo.in). Otherwise, connect in Mumbai.



Getting Around

The city has plenty of auto-rickshaws, but taxis are more reliable. You can hail one in the street or have your hotel call ahead.



STAY

ITC Grand Chola 63 Anna Salai, Guindy; itchotels.in; doubles from Rs10,000.

Leela Palace Adyar Seaface, 175 Sathy Dev Avenue Ext., M.R.C. Nagar; theleela.com; doubles from Rs8,167.

Raintree Hotel, Anna Salai 636 Anna Salai, Teynampet; raintreehotels.com; doubles from Rs8,500.

DO

Kanchipuram Take a day trip to this city on the Palar River.

Kapaleeswarar Temple

12 N. Mada St., Mylapore; mylaikapaleeswarar.tnhrce.in.

Madhava Perumal Temple Mylapore; madhavaperumaltemple.tnhrce.in.

Madras Music Academy

New No. 168 (Old No. 306) T.T.K. Rd.; musicacademymadras.in.

SHOP

Radha Gold 36 N. Mada St., Mylapore; 91-44/2498-5964.

Sundari Silks 38 N. Usman Rd., T. Nagar; sundarisilks.com.

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EATING THE NEW MIAMI

How South American immigrants, Southern revivalists, gastro-entrepreneurs and superstar chefs created the most sizzling food scene in America.

BY ANYA VON BREMSEN
PHOTOGRAPHED BY MATTHIEU SALVAING





Clockwise from top left: Sweet corn with shiso butter at Zuma; Viva Mexico's tacos; Florida heirloom tomatoes at Pubbelly; a ceviche sampling at La Mar by Gastón Acuria; cheese flan and *cafecito* at Versailles Bakery; chicken sopes at Cantina La Veinte; fried chicken, watermelon and waffles at Yardbird.

IT'S PAST 9 P.M. IN MIAMI— THE FASHIONABLY LATE LATIN DINNER HOUR.

A Lamborghini shimmers its way through Philippe Starck's Easter Island-esque columns at the sleek condo complex Icon Brickell. Behind the Lambo trails a tomato red Porsche, then a Jaguar the color of enameled kale. My boyfriend, Barry, ogles the parade of conveyances. I fix my gaze on the stilettos that descend from the cars: Louboutins and metallic Jimmy Choos, steeper than anything spotted even in Moscow. The killer heels, and the men with fat wallets who love them, head inside past the soaring black-onyx bar, into the dining room of a new Mexican restaurant called Cantina La Veinte.

The impossibly tall space is all Art Deco allusions, with an ethnographic museum's worth of artifacts arranged on lacquered black shelves. "Godzilla meets Gatsby" is how our friend Elias—a Greek-Argentine wine importer and longtime local who thinks nothing of flying to London or San Sebastián for a meal—describes it. Out the vast windows, skyscrapers glitter across the palm-fringed Miami River. This might be the country's most stunning new restaurant. The concept, haute Mexican, is apparently daring in a city where Cubans, with their love of *lechón* and plantains, still dictate taste. An ace young Mexican chef, Santiago Gómez, runs the kitchen; a brigade of *tortilleras* shape corn discs in customers' view. We'd meant this as a quick margarita stop, but the guacamole, unadulterated by promiscuous seasoning, prompts more tastings from the regional menu. Fragrant Yucatecan masa pillows known as *panuchos* bulge with black beans beneath shreds of achiotemarinated pulled pork. Mexico City-style *tacos gobernador* cradle sweet shrimp. The last time I was in Brickell, the area just south of downtown Miami, was around the 2008 market crash. The condos stood empty and dark, eerie ghosts from a derailed future. Now Brickell is bustling, construction has skyrocketed, and the restaurant epicenter is shifting here from South Beach.

For the three decades I've been visiting, Miami has been a city where the DJ mattered more than the chef. With the exception of Cuban cuisine—like *picadillo*, a soupy, zesty, minced beef dish I had once at the iconic Versailles restaurant after crashing a Celia Cruz concert—305 was the area code for awful hotel food. Things began to improve in the mid-aughts with the fresh, personal cooking of Michelle Bernstein (during my visit she was getting ready to open Seagrape at the new Thompson Miami Beach Hotel) and Michael Schwartz (Michael's Genuine, the Cypress Room). As these indie stars were winning James Beard Awards—and as Miami was evolving into a luxury shopping hub and

safe-deposit box for wealthy South Americans, Russians and others—a hotel boom started attracting high-voltage chefs: Scott Conant and Daniel Boulud, Michael Mina and José Andrés. It's this combination of homegrown talent and global all-stars, plus that cash-fueled social scene, that has sparked the food renaissance I've come here to report on. Suddenly, Miami has become one of America's most dynamic restaurant cities.

FRIED RICE VIA THE ANDES

After our brief Mexico spell at Cantina La Veinte, we follow the crowd to nearby La Mar by Gastón Acurio, a ceviche-centric place at the Mandarin Oriental. Acurio, the Peruvian gastro-god, is pulling back from the food world (to run for president, whisper my sources). We claim seats on the terrace. Tropical breezes ripple Biscayne Bay. Over pisco sours and a clean-tasting fluke ceviche, Ana Quincoces, the witty, leggy alumna of *The Real Housewives of Miami*, decodes the Miami Woman for us. Artificial tan. Hair extensions. Pilates. Twenty-three-centimeter heels. "Otherwise we feel pale and short—and flabby and bald," says Quincoces, who approached her *Housewives* gig with the relish of a pop anthropologist. The arrival of a stone bowl of rice, topped with a layer of shrimp omelette, interrupts her. The waiter tosses the eggs into the sizzling rice dotted with Chinese sausages, roast pork and pickled ginger. It's fried rice meets Korean *bibimbap*—devised by Japanese-Peruvian chef Diego Oka as an homage to a *chifa* (Chinese-Peruvian) classic. "Crazy delicious," I say. "Chinese-Peruvian fusion, whoa," Barry exclaims. Ana shrugs. "So? My mom is Chinese-Cuban-American."

THE GASTRO PUB PIONEER

"For the longest time, Miami was a town young chefs abandoned for New York or Chicago," Andreas Schreiner is telling me while I sip a malty Tripel from the local Holy Mackerel brewery at his restaurant, Pubbleby. The thirtysomething Schreiner is Colombian-Austrian, raised in Puerto Rico. After directing food and beverage at fancy Miami hotels, he escaped to Chicago, falling in love with cool spots like Avec. Why, he wondered, couldn't Miami have a neighborhood gastropub? And so, in late 2010, with partners Sergio Navarro and José Mendín, he opened Pubbleby in the emerging Sunset Harbour section of Miami Beach. Its instant success has spawned a mini-empire of hipster deliciousness: Pubbleby Sushi (irreverent rolls), Barceloneta (tapas), L'Echon (a brasserie). A porky mash-up



Cantina La Veinte.

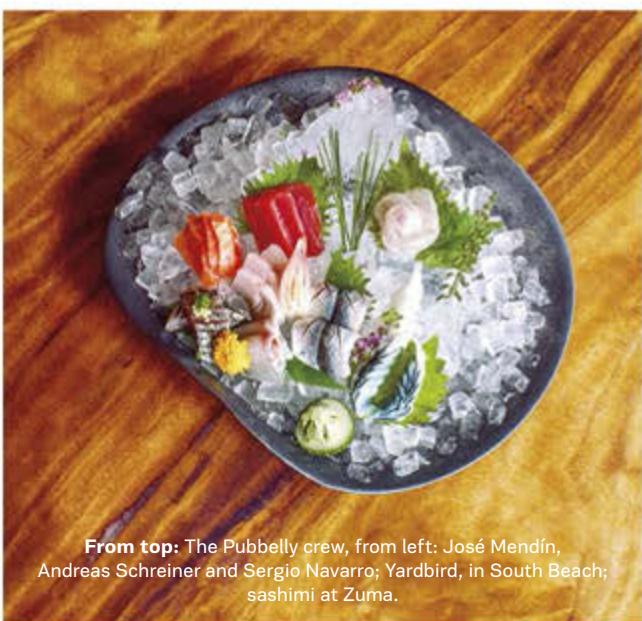
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SOUTH—OR
IN AMERICA,
PERIOD**



A view of Miami Beach from the SLS hotel.



Clockwise from top left: Plating a dish at La Mar; the Bazaar by José Andrés; La Mar; Zuma's terrace.



From top: The Pubbelly crew, from left: José Mendín, Andreas Schreiner and Sergio Navarro; Yardbird, in South Beach; sashimi at Zuma.

of Latin and Asian flavors and progressive European techniques, the original Pubbelly is a place where octopus is cooked sous vide in duck fat, where short-rib tartare is jolted by Japanese bean paste and served with toast slathered with goat butter. Consider its ur—Puerto Rican *mofongo*—normally a leaden dud of green plantains. Here the *plátano* gets soaked, fried, refried, studded with pork-belly bits, then served in an umami-rich puddle of shoyu broth. “They should enshrine this *nuevo mofongo* in San Juan,” Barry says. “Puertorriqueños do eat it—and practically weep,” Schreiner agrees.

SABOR LATINO

Since Cuban exiles began transforming the city back in the 1960’s, Miami has also been a magnet for Nicaraguans and Salvadorans, Colombians and Peruvians. The city’s population is now 70 percent Latin. The day after our late dinner at La Mar, Elias takes me on a pan-Latin snackathon around Little Havana. First stop: La Camaronera, the iconic fried-fish joint known for its *pan con minuta*, a fried-snapper sandwich on a squishy white Cuban roll with a suggestive schmear of a mystery red sauce. Next we’re at Viva Mexico, a lime green taco shack festooned with piñatas and sombreros. Its owner hails from Michoacán, the western Mexican state known for drug cartels and the lard-simmered pork called carnitas. Hence the obsessively authentic roster of pig parts—stomach, leg, ears, tongue—loosely packed into thin corn tortillas, to be consumed with fiery splashes of salsa. Our bill is a fraction of what the swells pay for valet parking at Cantina La Veinte.

Come noon we’re perched at the Formica counter of the Calle Ocho branch of El Rey de las Fritas. We’re here to sample the *frita cubana*, a salty, cumin-y patty of beef and chorizo tucked into a pale bun under a blizzard of shoestring potatoes. A telenovela blares on TV. Customers gaze up from their *sopas de res* (beef soups) and gasp as a sultry beauty slugs her boyfriend right in the chops. But wait, why is everyone having steamy soup loaded with yuca when the main attraction is *fritas*? *Muy* cold out, *mamita*, the waitress explains. True, the temperature has dropped—to an icy 29 degrees.

THE SPANISH ARE COMING

The latest arrivals from the Spanish-speaking world are economic refugees escaping unemployment in Spain. You’ll find homesick Iberians sipping Riojas and cavas at the slightly madcap Niu Kitchen, which opened last summer. Clad in reclaimed wooden planks, the scruffy-chic space feels like a sliver of Barcelona’s Raval district shoehorned into downtown Miami. Barry and I bond with new amigos Jaime and Pep—Catalan TV types with nice Telemundo jobs—over perfect poached eggs in a cloud of foamy potatoes. Then we move to *xato*, a Catalan salad of frisée and *ventresca* (tuna belly) in a dusky *romesco* sauce. “*Estupendo*,” cries Jaime over the rice, which is not a paella but a *caldoso* (soupy) variety laced with *botifarra* sausage and squid. “Ah, *mar muntanya*, sea and mountains,” he sighs, and I see a nostalgic yearning in his eyes.

SOUTHERN COMFORTS

In this city of hyphenated cuisines and identities, one forgets that Florida is located in America's South—or in America, period. It took a Georgia native, John Kunkel, of the 50 Eggs restaurant group, to ignite Miami's Southern food craze. His Swine, in Coral Gables, serves mean barbecue and craft bourbons. Better still is a fried chicken brunch—biscuits or cheddar waffles?—at Kunkel's Yardbird, in South Beach. Pity the sweaty joggers out on the beach while you're in this corner space with sunlight filling the huge windows, Otis Redding and Johnny Cash on the sound system, a third mint julep in front of you. The fried-green-tomato BLT is wicked. But it's that chicken—brined for 27 hours, dredged in spiced flour, and fried in shortening to a deep Southern tan—that will linger. That and the wisdom displayed on a sign above the kitchen: "There are two kinds of people: those who love fried chicken and communists."

REVENGE OF THE CLONES

Some welcome the invasion of out-of-town restaurant brands—La Mar, Scarpetta, Hakkasan—while some shrug off these could-be-anywhere carbon copies. But even the latter folk admit that Zuma, at the Epic Hotel downtown, is their favorite restaurant. Ah, that worldly crowd, the sakes, the sushi! The epic *robata*-grilled king crab! I'm a Zuma groupie myself, ever since the London Knightsbridge original hooked me back in 2002. But I like the Miami branch the best. It's the warm, tactile design of stone, concrete, rice paper and wood. It's the decorative clientele, like the table of Frida Kahlo look-alikes next to a table of Slavic oligarchettes pouting into their sake-marinated black cod. The long sushi-tempura-*robata* menu can be daunting, so here's a plan: Follow the slender yellowtail *maki* with greaseless fried soft-shell crab served on peppery mizuna. From the *robata*, choose the smoky chicken wings, the candy-sweet corn, then sprinkle *shiso*-lime salt on the chewy slices of rare skirt steak. When the waitress recommends the green tea and banana cake, trust her.

South Beach may no longer be the restaurant epicenter, but good luck picking from the steady stream of new spots—many of them arrivals from other cities. Lure Fishbar, at the Loews Miami Beach Hotel, an offshoot of the adorable New York original, serves killer cocktails and briny seafood *plateaux*. The *otoro* (fatty tuna) at the Shelborne Wyndham Grand South Beach hotel's new Morimoto is Tokyo-worthy. A fan of the Spanish avant-gardist José Andrés, I book at his Bazaar, inside the sexy SLS South Beach. Before dinner, we meet our art-world friends Teresa and Luis at the retro-chic Regent Cocktail Club. Julio Cabrera, its cult Cuban mixologist, talks Hemingway and the Floridita as he stirs and shakes impeccable mojitos and daiquiris. Finally, we settle under an octopoid chandelier inlaid with seashells at the Bazaar. A liquid-nitrogenized caipirinha materializes as we browse the menu. There are Philippe Starck's *trompe l'oeil* bookshelves on the wall, and on our plates the chef's *trompe l'oeil* olives (green spherifications bursting with olive oil). A puff composed mostly of air molecules, Swiss cheese foam and a curl of *jamón* is dubbed a "Cubano in Honor of Café Versailles."

The crowd is stunning tonight, and the kitchen's on fire. Adrià-inspired dazzlers (oysters under a cloche filled with applewood smoke) alternate with sharply executed Iberian classics. *Croquetas* arrive in an glass sneaker. A tuna ceviche rises, Venus-like, from dragon fruit under pink hibiscus lather. "Why don't we have such sexy places in Brooklyn?" Teresa laments. Luis flashes back to mid-eighties *Miami Vice*—era South Beach. Cocaine gangs, Marielitos, feral underground nightclubs, decaying Art Deco. As if on cue, Michael Mann, the show's executive producer, walks by. Dying to ask what he thinks of Miami's restaurant renaissance, I follow him onto the terrace bar. But he seems to have vanished into the poolside party's hazy perspective. In vain I search for him among the forest of killer stilettos—then return to my deconstructed Key lime pie. +

GUIDE TO MIAMI RESTAURANTS

Bazaar by José Andrés at SLS South Beach
1701 Collins Ave., Miami Beach; sbe.com; US\$60.

Cantina La Veinte
495 Brickell Ave., Miami; 1-786/623-6135; US\$80.

El Rey de las Fritas
1821 S.W. Eighth St., Miami; elreydelasfritas.com; US\$20.

La Camaronera Seafood Joint & Fish Market
1952 W. Flagler St., Miami; garciabrothersseafood.com; US\$40.

La Mar by Gastón Acurio
500 Brickell Key Dr., Miami; mandarinoriental.com; US\$90.

Lure Fishbar
1601 Collins Ave., Miami Beach; lurefishbar.com; US\$100.

Morimoto South Beach
1801 Collins Ave., Miami Beach; shelbornewyndhamgrand.com; US\$110.

Niu Kitchen
134 N.E. Second Ave., Miami; niukitchen.com; US\$45.

Pubbelly
1418 20th St., Miami Beach; pubbellyboys.com; US\$60.

Regent Cocktail Club
1685 James Ave., Miami Beach; galehotel.com.

Versailles Bakery
3501 S.W. Eighth St., Miami; versaillesrestaurant.com; US\$20.

Viva Mexico
542 S.W. 12th Ave., Miami; 1-786/350-6360; US\$15.

Yardbird Southern Table & Bar
1600 Lenox Ave., Miami Beach; runchickenrun.com; US\$90.

Zuma
270 Biscayne Blvd. Way, Miami; zumarestaurant.com; US\$80.

Restaurant prices represent approximate cost of dinner for two.

T+L DECODER

Our Definitive Guide to

Vancouver



Forward-thinking restaurants, hotels and galleries—all surrounded by snowcapped mountains and centuries-old evergreens—have transformed this Pacific coast boomtown into an outdoorsy capital of cool. By Bruce Schoenfeld.

Photographed by Grant Harder



STAY

SEE+DO

SHOP

EAT

LOCAL TAKE

**The easy way up
Grouse Mountain.**



Lay of the Land

Downtown

Framed by English Bay and Coal Harbour, downtown is full of Asian restaurants, big-name shops and shimmering skyscrapers.

Gastown

Vancouver's oldest neighborhood is home to grand historic buildings and fashion boutiques.

Kitsilano

The happening area on the west side attracts the young and stylish to its organic restaurants and popular Kits Beach.

South Granville

The city's best galleries and design stores, along with great sidewalk cafés, are in South Granville, which borders downtown.

Yaletown

A formerly run-down warehouse district, Yaletown now has a thriving nightlife scene.

Getting Around

The city is easily walkable and taxis are plentiful. There's also Skytrain (translink.ca), an efficient light-rail system.



The Rosewood suite at the Rosewood Hotel Georgia.

Our favorite hotels across the city.

LODEN HOTEL

If you're looking for an unpretentious, eco-friendly hotel with views of the North Shore Mountains, this is it. The 70 rooms are decorated in shades of green and chocolate brown, and thoughtful touches include en suite Wii units and yoga mats. At night, locals congregate at the buzzy Tableau Bar Bistro for French-influenced dishes and an expansive wine list. theloden.com; C\$165.

ROSEWOOD HOTEL GEORGIA

After a five-year makeover, this iconic hotel reopened in 2011 with a Roaring Twenties vibe. We love its Art Deco-inspired details like the gilded clock and elevator dial in the

lobby and the hand-carved sandstone frieze in the ballroom. Bonus: a courtesy chauffeured Bentley is on hand for spins around the city. rosewoodhotels.com; C\$309.

SHANGRI-LA HOTEL

The brand's first North American property combines Vancouver's easygoing style with Far East design. In the high-ceilinged lobby, you'll find a two-story painting of a single brushstroke by Shanghai artist Xuyuan Wang. Upstairs, the rooms mix black-and-white art with B&B Italia furniture. shangri-la.com; C\$250.

FAIRMONT PACIFIC RIM

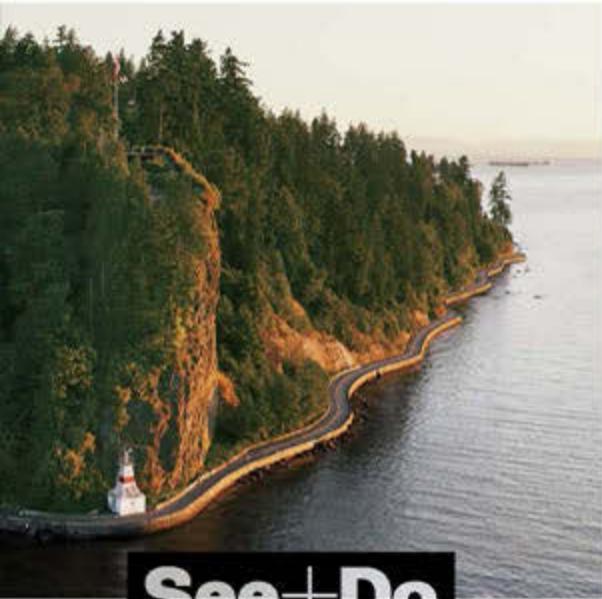
One of Fairmont's four hotels in the city, the Pacific Rim

is connected to the Vancouver Convention Centre but has the soul of a boutique property. There are outdoor meditation pods at the spa, Mascioni linens, and private butlers for guests in the top-floor suites. fairmont.com; C\$329.

WEDGEWOOD HOTEL & SPA

This family-owned, 83-room hotel downtown is outfitted with brocade and toile de Jouy fabrics, deep leather sofas and antiques that give the place a European feel. Book a table for dinner at the restaurant, Bacchus, then make your way to the hotel's dark, clubby bar for a digestif. wedgewoodhotel.com; C\$228.

Hotel prices represent starting rates for double occupancy.



See + Do

Four cultural stops not to miss.

GRANVILLE ISLAND

To get to this peninsula, hop a water taxi at the south end of Hornby Street. After disembarking, tour the nearby small art galleries and craft studios, stroll through the daily Public Market, or go for a beer tasting at Granville Island Brewing. granvilleisland.com.

FLYOVER CANADA

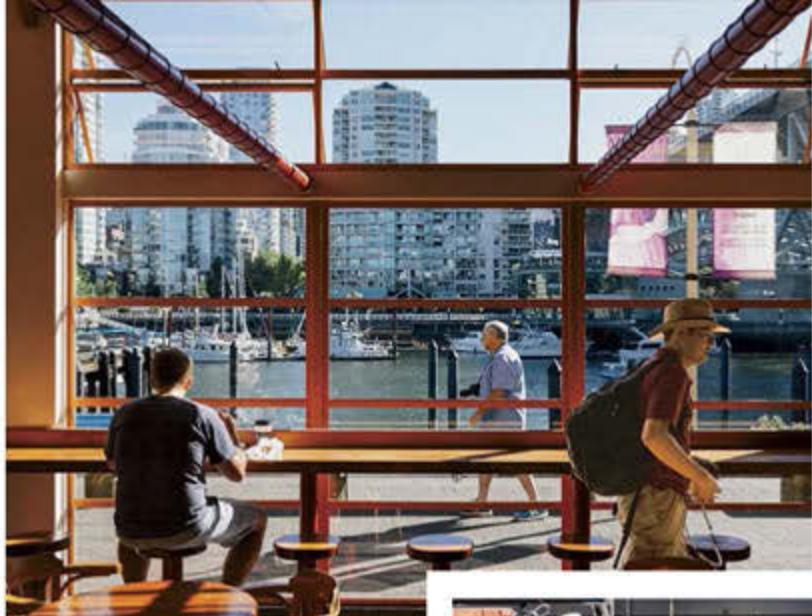
This is no standard IMAX movie. Strapped into a seat that moves in six directions, you'll experience a simulated flight from the Maritimes to Vancouver, complete with effects like wind and mist. flyovercanada.com.

VANCOUVER ART GALLERY

In a renovated 1906 courthouse, the gallery is known for both its visiting contemporary exhibitions (featuring works by Ai Weiwei and Robert Youds) and its 10,000-piece permanent collection that showcases pieces by regional and international artists. vanartgallery.bc.ca.

STANLEY PARK

The 4,000-hectare waterfront park is catnip for nature lovers, with numerous biking and walking paths and plenty of green space. Go there at dusk and watch the sun set from the seawall. vancouver.ca.



Clockwise from left: Stanley Park; the Granville Island Public Market; at the market.



Coastal Peoples Fine Arts Gallery.

Shop

Where to find the best homegrown fashion, housewares and more.

In the 105-year-old Mercantile Building, the **Block** (theblock.ca) carries a carefully curated selection of men's and women's clothing from Canada and beyond. Look for tops by Dace and vintage-style jewelry by Anna de Courcy, both local labels. • At **Zonda Nellis** (zondanellis.com), on Granville Street, you'll find free-flowing silk and linen dresses created by the eponymous designer. • The collection of one-of-a-kind ceramic *matcha* bowls at **05 Tea** (05tea.com) is the centerpiece of a line of tea accessories that could be considered fine art. • Down the street, **Kaarigar Handicrafts** (kaarigarhandicrafts.com), in Yaletown, sells Indian home décor and accessories including hand-beaten copper jugs and *mojri* slippers. • Inside **Coastal Peoples Fine Arts Gallery** (coastalpeoples.com), there are colorful totem poles, carved stone masks and paintings made by Inuit artists and regional tribal groups. • Downtown, **Woo to See You** (wootoseeyou.com) sells mostly monochromatic women's wear, sourced from Korea and Australia, in a light-filled space.



L'Abattoir Restaurant.
Below: Mushrooms, snap peas and an egg with soy-yuzu brown butter at Pidgin.



Eat

Vancouver's hottest restaurants serve everything from shucked oysters to haute Asian comfort food.

PIDGIN

At Pidgin, chef Shin Suzuki combines Japanese flavors with the rib-sticking fare of the Canadian prairie in dishes like sautéed wild mushrooms and soft-boiled eggs with pea purée. pidginyvr.com; C\$40.

RODNEY'S OYSTER HOUSE

This classic seafood shack specializes in red-sauce fish stew and West Coast oysters—as many as a dozen varieties—all accompanied by regional reds and whites. rohvan.com; C\$40.

L'ABATTOIR RESTAURANT

In Gastown, Vancouver's first jail has been retrofitted into this split-level restaurant. Try the steelhead-and-potato salad and lightly smoked duck, and don't miss bartending wunderkind Shaun Layton's inventive cocktail menu. labattoir.ca; C\$100.

HAWKSWORTH

David Hawksworth is arguably the most accomplished chef in town, and his stylish restaurant in the Rosewood Hotel Georgia is the counterpoint to the city's downscale dining trend. The grilled meats, fish and vegetables are impeccably prepared and the service is top-notch, too. hawksworthrestaurant.com; C\$120.

city's downscale dining trend.

The grilled meats, fish and vegetables are impeccably prepared and the service is top-notch, too. hawksworthrestaurant.com; C\$120.

MORNING SHANGHAI

Just south of downtown, Richmond has one of North America's largest Chinese communities and is full of authentic Asian eateries. Among the best is this small spot in a shopping mall. What to order? The steamed dumplings, leek pie and Shanghai noodles. 8291

Alexandra Rd., Richmond; 1-778/297-6098; C\$25.

GUU WITH GARLIC

The Kitanoya Guu restaurant group's five izakayas across Vancouver each have a slightly different focus. This one, downtown, is true to its name: dishes like deep-fried breaded pork loin, udon soup, and teriyaki chicken all get a garlic kick. guu-izakaya.com; C\$30.

Restaurant prices represent approximate cost of dinner for two, unless otherwise noted.



From left: At the top of Grouse Grind Trail; the Parker restaurant; Roden Gray boutique.

Local Take

Get an insider's peek at the city from three natives.



SARAH MCLACHLAN
Grammy Award-winning singer and songwriter

"One of my favorite spots for breakfast is **Café Medina** (medina-cafe.com; breakfast for two C\$40), which serves comfort food in cast-iron skillets. I order the waffles with salted caramel. To work off the meal, I love hiking the **Grouse Grind** (grousemountain.com) from the top of Nancy Greene Way. The route follows the tram line, so you can walk up, have a cappuccino, then ride back down."



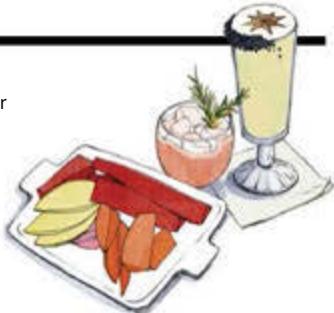
TREVOR LINDEN
President, Vancouver Canucks hockey team

"My go-to café in the morning is **Nook** (nookrestaurant.ca; brunch for two C\$25) near Kits Beach. It's a laid-back place with a real local feel that has great coffee. In the summer, I'll take my bike on the ferry to the town of Gibsons (bcferries.com) and ride the trails along the Sunshine Coast. On the way back, I always stop at the **White Spot** (whitespot.ca; C\$30) on the ferry for a burger on the sundeck. Downtown, cool boutique **Roden Gray** (rodengray.com) sells beautiful linen shirts and pants. "It's where I do all my shopping."



ANTHONY VON MANDL
Proprietor, Mission Hill Family Estate Winery

"The perfect way to start the day is with a double-baked almond croissant at **Thomas Haas** (thomas-haas.com), a fourth-generation pâtissier and Daniel Boulud alum. Nearby, **Michael McBride Menswear** (michaelmcbride.ca) stocks lesser-known Canadian and international brands; the staff go out of their way to make same-day alterations. For dinner, I'm a big fan of the **Parker** (theparkervancouver.com; tasting menu C\$40 per person), a 19-seat vegetarian restaurant in Chinatown with a fantastic tasting menu."



Where to Drink After Dark

Cocktail culture is thriving in Vancouver, where top mixologists are underground celebrities. At **Blackbird Public House & Oyster Bar** (donnellygroup.ca), Trevor Kallies makes bespoke drinks while presiding over a 120-bottle scotch menu. • **Cactus Club Café** (cactusclubcafe.com) serves killer margaritas with fresh-squeezed watermelon juice. • The gritty Chinatown setting of the **Keef Bar** (thekeefbar.com) belies the upscale concoctions served there, like the Buffalo Soldier, made with Buffalo Trace, tamarind, ginger and lemon. • **Bao Bei Chinese Brasserie** (bao-bei.ca) is known for its Bakku-Shan, featuring Sichuan peppercorns and fig-infused rum, which is best enjoyed with Chinese pickles.

Turkey



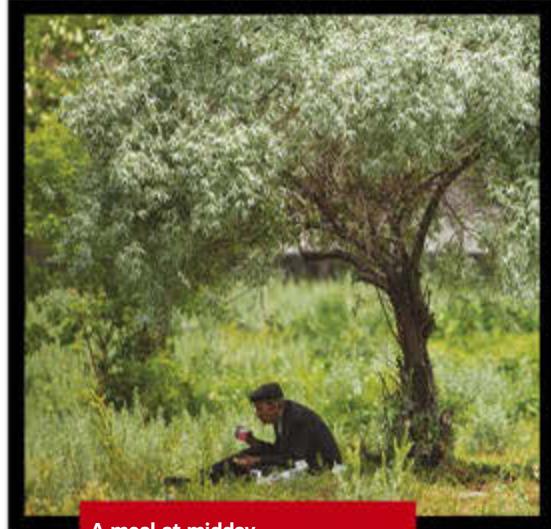
Winter white out

The snowy road from Aksaray to Corum, in north central Anatolia. The Asia Minor region, which sustains long, harsh winters, is considered the country's heartland, and was once a global crossroads.



Long, summer shadows

A splash of color from fruit and vegetable sellers in Diyarbakir, in southeastern Turkey. The photo was taken from the ancient black basalt wall that forms a 5.5-kilometer circle around the old city.



A meal at midday

Enjoying a solitary springtime picnic of cheese, *pide* bread and *ayran* (a salted yogurt drink) in Kars, northeastern Turkey. Outside of the big cities, residents retain strong links to their land.



Farm to table

A woman milks goats in Karacadag, a village the southeast of the country. She'll sell the milk to the village cheesemaker, who in turn makes the region's famous braided salted cheese on site.



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66 Let It Snow Set off on a course of winter sports in the country that does them best. In Switzerland, there's an icy activity for everyone. **ADAM H. GRAHAM** highlights where to find the best skiing, snowboarding, winter hiking, dog sledding and even downhill biking.



Relaxing, with the snow-covered slopes nearby, page 66.

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A leafy look at Bern. Photographed by Lauryn Ishak.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: LAURYN ISHAK; COURTESY OF CHEDI ANDERMATT; LAURYN ISHAK; COURTESY OF FOUR SEASONS GENEVA; LAURYN ISHAK

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Don't forget Ticino

Where else in the world can you take in sun, snow and palm trees? This often-overlooked region in south central Switzerland offers an Italian flair while still being distinctly Swiss. For those in the know, it is well worth exploring for a day, a week, or even your entire vacation. Sip espressos in the sun and enjoy downhill ski runs with sweeping views of Lakes Maggiore and Lugano during the winter. The region's nearby valleys are buried deep in snow, which slows life down to a manageable pace. Come summer, Ticino's mix of nature and culture, mountains and plains, the past and the future is on display at its fullest. Balmy chestnut forests give way at higher elevations to the ice and rock of the mountains, while subtropical gardens lure locals and visitors alike at the lower elevations. Of the man-made attractions, piazzas and churches compete for your attention with those Alps and the sweep of valleys that twist down to pristine lakes. Ticino: it should definitely be on your itinerary.

#Switzerlandbyrail

Visiting the country by train is one route to a laid-back vacation.

instagram.com/travelandleisureasia

1.



2.



3.



1. **Glacier Express** A 7.5-hour journey from Engadine to the Matterhorn

2. **Palm Express** A great way to see the winding roads of Ticino

3. **Grand Train Tour** One ticket takes in Zurich, St. Gallen,

Lucerne and many more stops

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February 2015

On any map, Switzerland often appears relatively small. Yet, as this special issue underscores, it remains a nation that packs in quite a bit to see, do and experience in that space. As mentioned in "Big Little Country" (page 54), Mark Twain put it best more than a century ago: "Switzerland would be a mighty big place if it were ironed flat." While that story serves as a primer on how to visit the Alpine nation today, the rest of this issue delves beneath the surface.

Everyone knows of Switzerland's love affair with all things outdoors in the winter months—the mountainous vistas out most windows attest to the nearby lures of some of the world's best ski resorts and winter hiking routes. In "Let it Snow" (page 66), writer Adam H. Graham outlines some of his favorites right down to how to arrive in style in, say, St. Moritz for an ultimate winter break.

Not as immediately obvious is "Zurich by Design" (page 38), an in-depth look at the city most consider simply as a staid banking center, something it is but only until you scratch the surface. What comes through, sometimes literally on the wrong side of the tracks, is a vibrant undercurrent of fashion, food and residents who know how to have a bit of fun. All you have to do is ask.

Ask is exactly what Berlin-based writer Diana Hubbell did at the top of a mountain ("The Alps on Adrenaline," page 46). Exactly what her query is better answered by reading her story, though be warned it is a shock to any sedate system. Call it a force of geography not to mention a few adventurous locals, but Hubbell travels out of her comfort zone, lives to tell the tale and has a great time as a result. In that way, she sounds like some of the people she meets in and around the beautiful playground that Interlaken has become.

For those readers who prefer more down to earth vacations, we also tour Lake Geneva and its vineyards, stop by a handful of specialist spas throughout the nation and even take a hike into that special corner of the country known as Ticino. In Switzerland, there's always something around the next corner. —CHRISTOPHER KUCWAY



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Radar

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Zipping along the Rhaetian Railway.

OBSESSION

A TICKET TO RIDE

Diana Hubbell soaks in Switzerland's impossibly photogenic countryside on a winding rail journey past lush meadows and snow-capped peaks.

Whoever came up with the adage "It's about the journey, not the destination" must have been talking about a train trip. As much as we love planes for their efficiency and cruises for their over-the-top extravagance, there really is no substitute for the romance of a cross-country rail trip. And no one, absolutely no one, has combined that vaguely nostalgic allure with contemporary convenience better than the Swiss. All of the engines, from the vintage

cogwheel trains that scale the heights of the Bernese Alps to the eco-friendly electric street trams of Geneva run with—dare we say it?—watch-like precision. The 240-kilometer **Rhaetian Railway** (rhh.ch) from Thusis, Switzerland to Tirano, Italy, even boasts UNESCO World Heritage status. It's a route most tourists ignore, which is a shame, since there are few sights more poetic than these fire engine-red cars whistling along limestone cliffs and over 383 bridges.

Equally worthy of admiration is the **GoldenPass Line** (goldenpass.ch), a fleet of gorgeously appointed trains that traverse some of the country's most scenic spots. These rails whisk passengers from Interlaken's peaks to Montreux's vineyards and beyond. For a day trip, hop aboard the whimsically named Chocolate or Cheese lines for a guided tour focusing on Switzerland's most famous culinary exports. The Panoramic Trains, with their gigantic glass

panels along the walls and ceilings, are the visual equivalent of a high-definition IMAX screen. The show is best enjoyed with flutes of champagne offered on board. For sheer retro glamour though, it's hard to top the line's Belle Epoque coaches. Screen heartthrobs Lauren Bacall or Ingrid Bergman would look right at home in these gilded 1930s-style carriages. With dark wood, velvety upholstery and wine tasting cars, you'll hope the journey never ends. +



Clockwise from above: Sunset in Bern from the Kornhausbrücke; patrons enjoying the sun at Adriano's Kaffeerösterei; bartender at Kornhauskeller.

WHY GO

BEAUTIFUL BERN

Often overlooked in favor of Switzerland's bigger metropolises, this culturally rich center deserves to be on every traveler's hit list. Here are five reasons why.
By Diana Hubbell

It may be the capital of a country famed for its efficiency, punctuality and enviable work-ethic, but Bern is all about laid-back charm. In the warmer months, its archways hide covert block parties, while locals don swimsuits and head to the city center's pristine river for a dip.

Because the past is alive and well and literally everywhere. History is all but inescapable in this gracefully aging city. The entire downtown, a twisting labyrinth of cobblestone alleys, was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site more than three decades ago. As a result, its sandstone walls, medieval public fountains and 6 kilometers of covered archways have remained perfectly preserved. A stroll through the two principal parallel streets reveals a story behind just about everything, from the restaurant where Napoleon used to lunch to the former brothels Casanova once haunted. Most impressive is the Zytglogge, an early sign of the Swiss ingenuity with timepieces. After 600 years, the original gears on this clock tower are still ticking. When the hour strikes, there are dancing bears, a crowing rooster and a miniature golden figure to ring the bells.



Enjoying the view at Restaurant Schwellenmatteli. Left: Pulpo a la Gallega at Bar Volver. Below: Homemade ciabatta at Bar Volver.



Because the coffee culture is infectious. Coffee breaks in Bern are long, lazy and frequent, and with cafés this good, it's easy to see why. Across the square from one another, **Adriano's** (Theaterplatz 2; 41-31/318-8831; adrianos.ch; coffee for two CHF10) and **Lorenzini** (Hotlgasse 10; 41-31/318-5067; lorenzini.ch; coffee for two CHF10), both Italian owned and run, are in fierce competition for the distinction of the city's best espresso. The latter also has an extensive food menu, while the former's single origin brews with a flawless *crema* are the stuff of java junkie dreams. Meanwhile, the modish **Kaffee Montag** (Gerechtigkeitsgasse 27; 41-31/311-3107; kaffee montag.ch; coffee for two CHF8) has homemade desserts and, curiously, a glass-floored bathroom that gives you a view of the city's old network of underground pipes. For a little history with your latte, slip into **Kaffee Einstein** (Kramgasse 49;

41-31/312-2828; einstein-kaffee.ch; coffee for two CHF9). Once the address where a certain German scribbled down his famous $E=mc^2$, it's now a magnet for local hipsters.

Because you might just have the best Wiener Schnitzel—or meal—of your life. At **Jack's Brasserie** (Bahnhofplatz 11; 41-31/326-8080; schweizerhof-bern.ch; dinner for two CHF140), a bastion of Old World grandeur resplendent in gleaming wood and brass, contemporary entrees and classics are treated with equal reverence. Pink-rare venison entrecôte with braised black salsify arrives bathed in truffle jus; duck breast is confited in cacao butter; and frothy pumpkin soup is poured, tableside, from a cauldron over a still life of garnishes. Best of all though is the Platonic ideal of the Wiener Schnitzel: a frisbee-size piece of tender veal, greaseless, crisp and finer than any you've ever had.

For a lighter bite, head to **Schwellenmätteli** (Dalmaziquai 11; 41-31/350-5001; schwellenm aetteli.ch; dinner for two CHF100), a river-terrace restaurant where the city's beautiful people sip Aperol spritzes and nibble on Mediterranean fare.

Because there's more nightlife in these historic halls than you might guess. Make no mistake: Bern is a living, breathing city, not a museum. Start your bar crawl through these ancient streets at the funky **Tredicipercento Weinkeller** (Rathausgasse 25; 41-31/311-8031; tredicipercento.ch; drinks for two CHF28), where there's only one menu of rotating small plates to go with the sprawling wine list. Your next stop is **Kornhauskeller** (Kornhausplatz 18; 41-31/327-7272; bindella.ch/de/kornhauskeller.html; drinks for two CHF40). Once the city's granary, this underground haven with its high, vaulted ceilings and baroque paintings now has an excellent selection of whiskeys and ambiance to spare. Finally, end with the inventive tapas—think elderflower-pear gnocchi with sage—and a customized nightcap at trendy **Volver** (Rathausplatz 8; 41-31/312-0404; barvolver.ch; drinks for two CHF30).

Because there are contemporary works of art just as gawk-worthy as the ancient ones. Located on the outskirts of town, past the family of bears the Bernese still keep as local mascots, the impressive **Zentrum Paul Klee** shows off an impressive collection of more than 4,000 works of art by its namesake artist. Worth keeping in mind is that the undulating 1,750-square-meter facility also plays host to a variety of theater and musical performances throughout the year, as well as rotating exhibitions by other contemporary artists. **Zentrum Paul Klee**; *Monument im Fruchtland 3; 41-31/359-0101; zpk.org*. +

SPOTLIGHT

WINTER WONDERLAND

A luxe new resort has plucked the low-key chalet town of Andermatt from obscurity and put it squarely on the map.

By Diana Hubbell

For years, the plush resort towns of Verbier and St. Moritz lured Europe's glitterati with their flashy après-ski parties, while tiny Andermatt drew a select few looking to steer clear of the limelight. Considering its ample dusting of fresh powder and idyllic setting, it's a wonder that it stayed a secret for so long. With the December 2013 arrival of a serious luxury resort, the word was officially out. Thanks to Japanese SPIN Design Studio, **The Chedi Andermatt** is a study in understated opulence, imbuing the once sleepy spot with a touch of glamour while melting harmoniously into the area's quiet charm. The place has all the elements of your dream chalet—more than 200 fireplaces, wood paneling, fur, leather, imported Belgian slate and huge terraces overlooking alpine vistas—with the added bonus of cutting-edge amenities like iPad controls in each room, plus a 2,400-square-meter spa. With its location cradled between the Oberalp, St. Gotthard and Furka mountain passes, it also offers unparalleled access to those snowy slopes, plus personal "ski butlers" dressed in impeccably stylish Nordic sweaters to lend a hand. With sleek touches like that, it's only a matter of time before the A-listers start flocking. **The Chedi Andermatt; Gotthardstrasse 4, 6490 Andermatt; 41-41/888-7488; ghmhotels.com; doubles from CHF700.** **+**



From top: Comfort under the stars at The Chedi Andermatt; opulent creature comforts.



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WEEKENDER

RICH LANDS

The lush terroir surrounding Lake Geneva is home to rolling vineyards, historic towns and enough Michelin stars to light up the night sky. Diana Hubbell sets off for a weekend.

Vineyards intertwine along Lake Geneva.

Above right: Grapes at the ready.

Opposite: A picturesque pour; delicious dishes.



With his puffed, rosy cheeks and rotund figure, Domenico Bovy looks every bit like the feasting friar of so many medieval tales. The man knows his wine. He's leading me through what loosely could be called a tasting, although I've never in my life been to one was so generous or so personal. As the afternoon winds on, Domenico has several tables in stitches telling stories from the region's past, gesturing broadly to the sweeping panorama of glacial valley slopes and Lake Geneva's placid waters.

The wines here aged steps from my table in 50-year-old oak barrels, each hand-painted with a whimsical set of caricatures by Domenico's grandfather Maurice.

Although diverse, they all come from grapes that grow on these vertiginous lands. Two identical chasselas vines growing 20 meters apart can produce two different wines.

Welcome to Lavaux, a UNESCO World Heritage cultural landscape and Switzerland's second biggest wine-producing region, a land that's been growing grapes since monks first

tamed it in the 11th century. The area's spectacular scenery has made it a preferred destination of the global elite for decades. With verdant trellised inclines, villages dotted with bloom-decked cottages, and that dreamy vision of the Alps in the distance, it's easy to see why. A-listers from Audrey Hepburn to Coco Chanel have owned houses here.

Me? I'm just here for the food. Oh, and the wine, of course. People around here like to say that Lake Geneva's vineyards flourish in the heat of three suns: the direct sunlight and its reflections off of the lake waters and stone terraces. Practically everyone here is or knows someone involved in winemaking and the way of life is still as tethered to growing cycles as it was three

generations ago. Despite the fact that vines from more than 200 independent growers cover just about every piece of land, most of the wine never travels more than a few kilometers down the road. The terrain that renders vintages so varied also makes large yields impossible.

Not that anyone here seems to mind. Each year's crop is just more to share with friends, family and whomever else happens to be passing through.

Lausanne is the urban equivalent of an iceberg: three- and four-story restaurants, bars and shopping centers lurk below the surface, leaving the hilly, cobblestone alleys, sandstone buildings and contemporary art installations above

undisturbed. A quick stroll through these picturesque streets on a Saturday morning reveals that Lavaux is just as passionate about its food as its wine. As the sun rises, vendors crowd the streets hawking autumn's finest. There are fat figs, plump chestnuts, interlocking Hokkaido pumpkins and a whole rainbow of the season's final heirloom tomatoes.

Those same perfect ingredients appear later in my lunch at Auberge de l'Onde, an old favorite of Charlie Chaplin's, where I sample a porcini risotto wrapped in raw-cured ham. They no doubt have something to do with my dinner at Le Côté Jardin, where the plank-grilled seabass rests on a bed of foraged chanterelles and fried zucchini blossoms so light they practically levitate.

The restaurants in this speck of land boast a collective 19 Michelin stars and 1,434 points in the Gault & Millau guides, all from chefs striving to find ever more ingenious ways to use the local embarrassment of culinary riches.

Small wonder then that I still think wistfully about my dinner at La Vérande. With its crystal chandeliers, starched white linens and meticulously decorative interior, the restaurant has an over-the-top grandeur seldom seen these days. Of course, it doesn't hurt that the delicately seared fish with fava bean coulis, artichokes and ricotta gnocchi is practically perfect in every way. Virtually everything on my plate and in my glass came from within 30 kilometers of my table—just another sign of the richness of this land. +



STAY

Lausanne Palace & Spa
Rue du Grand-Chêne 7,
1003 Lausanne; 41-21/331-3131; lausanne-palace.com; doubles from CHF318.

Grand Hotel du Luc Rue d'Italie 1, 1800 Vevey; 41-21/925-0606; hoteldulac-vevey.ch; doubles from CHF450.

EAT + DRINK

The Côté Jardin Rue du Grand-Chêne 7, 1003 Lausanne; 41-21/331-3131; lausanne-palace.com; dinner for two CHF180.

La Pomme de Pin The placemats may be paper, but the food is as good today as it was when Winston Churchill used to frequent the place. Rue Cité Derrière 11-13 1005 Lausanne; 41-21/323-4656; lapommepin.ch; dinner for two CHF160.

Auberge de l'Onde
Centre du Village, Chemin Neuf, 1071 Saint-Saphorin; 41-21/925-4900; aubergedelonde.ch; set dinner for two CHF236.

La Vérande Rue d'Italie 1, 1800 Vevey; 41-21/925-0606; hoteldulac-vevey.ch; dinner for two CHF180.

Domaine Bovy Rue du Bourg de Plaît 15, 1071 Chexbres; 41-21/946-5125; domainebovy.ch.

Lavaux Vinorama A showcase of more than 260 wines from the region's vineyards. Route du Lac 2, 1071 Riva; 41-21/946-3131; lavaux-vinorama.ch; wine tastings for two CHF26.

Clockwise from right: Shopping and dining are still central at Zurich's airport; take a tour of the facility with your kids; there's space for quiet time.



AIRPORTS

LINGER LONGER

Long-touted as a playground of brand names and duty-free, Zurich Airport also has lots of fun for the smallest jetsetters. **By Jeninne Lee-St. John**

If you're anything like me, you want to spend as little time in the airport as possible. Check-in, security, departure, done with minutes to spare. The real destination awaits, right? Well, in line with the airport-as-destination trend sweeping the flight map, *Flughafen* Zurich is making it their mission to give everyone a reason to linger a little longer. Naturally, there's great shopping (Tiffany; Gucci; high-end department store Globus), but kids couldn't care less about brand names. Luckily, here, even the antsy-prone, hardest-to-entertain frequent fliers have a few places to frolic.

Take them to Observation Deck B, the world's first open-air airport walkway that lets you look down in the cockpits of planes at their gates. They'll be engrossed in the "airportscopes"—multimedia binoculars that display fun facts about the airport. There's a mini-airport where these jetsetters can

playact the lives of pilots, or, for more structured edutainment, fill out the pages of a coloring book based on the play-stations they complete. Got 90 minutes to spare? Take a bus tour of the entire airport, hitting up hangars, tunnels, the fire station and even the runway intersection.

Or, if you're in departures areas A or E, just bring them to the vibrant playrooms, free for all, that are stocked with toys, PlayStations, foosball tables and arts-and-crafts-making stations. Multilingual professional child-care-givers preside over the fun. So mommy and daddy might be forgiven for sneaking off to Center Bar to partake of Caviar House & Prunier seafood delights and toast to their kid-savvy travel planning. zurich-airport.com; *Observation Deck B* admission CHF5 for adults, CHF2 for kids aged 10-16 CHF2; *Guided Bus Tours* CHF8 for adults, CHF4 for kids 6-16. +

SPAS

SOOTHING SWISS WATERS

Don't let its industrious and efficient reputation fool you. Relaxing in this country is a serious business indeed. By Jeninne Lee-St. John and Diana Hubbell



L+P spa terrace.

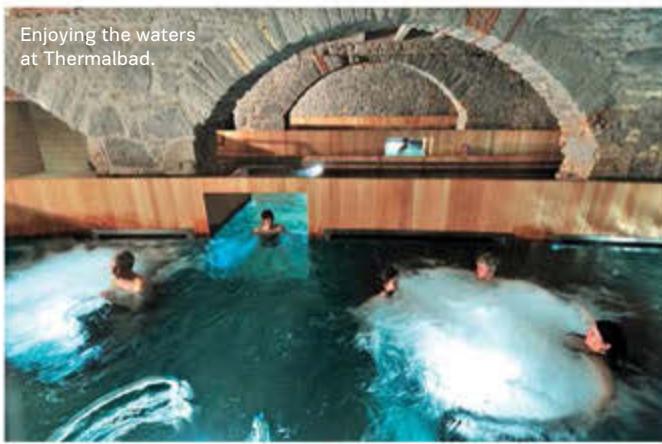
With bubbling natural springs, pristine mountain air and the prettiest surroundings you ever did see, Switzerland is the perfect place for a healing retreat. There's no need to head for the countryside to find that sense of serenity. These three urban spas offer a little soothing something for everyone.

Thermalbad & Spa, Zurich
Bear with us. We are about to suggest you take the water cure at an Irish-Roman bath

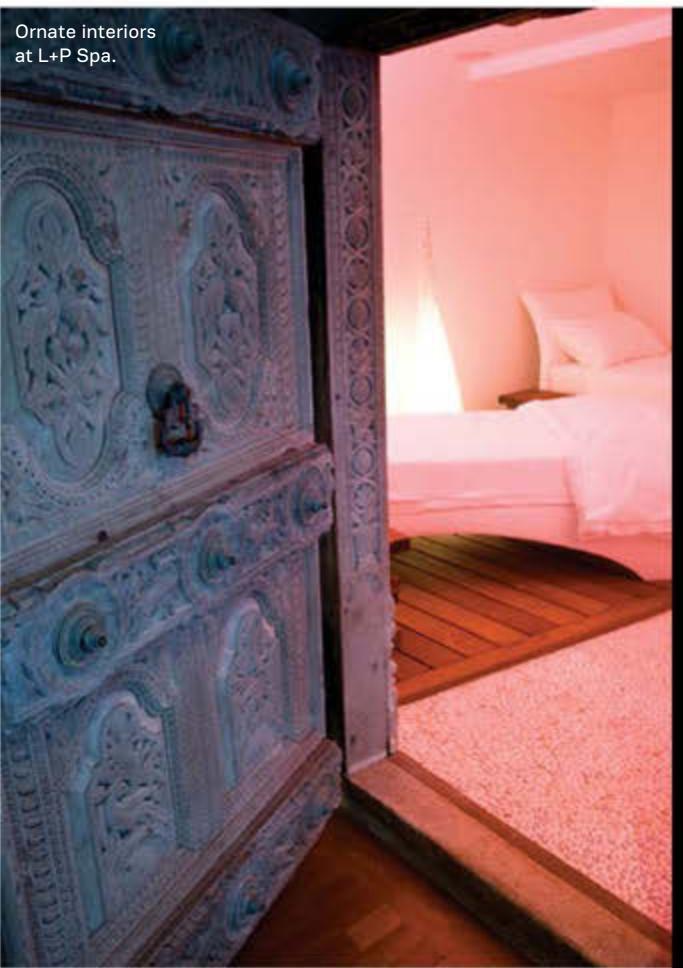
in Switzerland. We know it sounds country-hopping complicated, but spa tourism is an old tradition, with healers passing techniques among themselves across borders. Back in the middle of the 19th century, Dr. Richard Barter of County Cork became enamored of the water cure and built a bathhouse near Blarney, which tweaked the dry-air model of ancient Rome to incorporate flues pumping heated air under the floors and within the walls.

Combine Dr. Barter's patented space with the multi-stage process of warming the body, soaping it down, applying massage and then cooling, and you get the Irish-Roman bath. Plop it all into a renovated brewery in the middle of Zurich, and you get a stunning, new-world-meets-old haven. **Thermalbad & Spa** takes you from the aged depths of the b2 boutique hotel to its modern heights. The vaulted-ceilinged grottoes with three giant connected

bathing barrels filled with water from the city's subterranean Aqui Spring evoke the space's original use: it was where Hurlimann filled their barrels with beer as far back as 150 years ago. Down in these depths is where you also may indulge in your 10-step Irish-Roman rinse-down. But be sure to complete the circuit in the afternoon, because you'll want to be up in the rooftop pool by dusk. Alternating among the various jets and sprays in a bubbling →



Enjoying the waters at Thermalbad.



Ornate interiors at L+P Spa.



The Spa, a sleek stop.

cauldron of ahhh as the sun sets over the parklands and the roofs of Zurich is the only way we ever want to round out our day. *thermalbad-zeurich.ch; baths admission from CHF34, Irish-Roman ritual CHF58.*

CBE Concept Spa, Lausanne

With its pristine backdrop of powder-kissed mountains and rolling vineyards, it's no wonder that Lausanne long has been a healing getaway of choice. For nearly a century, this is where the world's well-to-do have gone for some much-needed R&R. More than a dozen health clinics, rehabilitation facilities and wellness centers dot the surrounding area.

That doesn't mean that you should wait until it's time for a check-up to take advantage of this region's therapeutic benefits though. Instead, we'd suggest you check-in to the ayurvedic-oriented **CBE Concept Spa** to ease all that stress away. This sprawling 2,100-meter-oasis in the elegant Lausanne Palace & Spa is a cocoon even more serene than its surroundings. You could easily idle the days away here just drifting between the terrace overlooking Lake Geneva, the indoor heated pool,

Jacuzzi, therapeutic baths and multiple varieties of saunas. Thanks to the Yogi Booster café, with its virtuous selection of organic smoothies, juices and veg-heavy dishes—all developed with the help of an in-house naturopath, of course—you might be tempted never to leave. While there, round out your rejuvenation with a detoxifying Abhyanga treatment, where copious amounts of herb-infused oils are drizzled and kneaded all over the body. Just what the doctor ordered. *lausanne-palace.com; day access to spa facilities CHF95; 50-minute Abhyanga Massage CHF150.*

The Spa, Bern

When Hotel Schweizerhof, reopened its doors after a head-to-toe refurbishment a couple of years ago, it offered a new take on a stay in the capital. In place of the old stuffy baroque décor, the hotel sported **The Spa**, a sleek urban haven with everything that the steady influx of business travelers and politicians need to unwind fast. Make a beeline from the train station directly to this 500-square-meter subterranean wonder world and let the complete relaxation begin.

Start your journey by sweating out the toxins in the 85-degrees-Celsius Finnish sauna. Follow all that scorching dry heat with a trip to the hammam, or head straight for the fountain of crushed ice for a shock to hit your restart button. After that jolt, plus maybe a soak in the pamper pool, indulge in a little

cross-cultural recuperation with a Hanakasumi treatment. Perfumed with lotus and cherry blossoms, this Japanese-inspired ritual gently exfoliates the body, paying extra attention to travel-sore feet. *schweizerhof-bern.ch; day access to spa facilities CHF68; 75-minute Hanakasumi treatment CHF200. +*

DISCOVERY

STORYBOOK ST. GALLEN

In the northeast, Jeninne Lee-St. John skips through a candy-colored UNESCO-listed village where ancient legends have given way to modern design.

Once upon a time, a Celtic hermit befriended a bear, spurned a bishopric and ended up founding, despite his best efforts, what would become—way off in a wooded valley of eastern Switzerland—both a major center for learning and the global embroidery capital.

Our yarn, if you will, begins with the birth of Gallus in 550 AD, who became a missionary so renowned for his

persuasive preaching that legend has it he wooed a bear into fetching him firewood. Church leaders repeatedly tried to lure him out of his self-imposed solitary confinement; they failed during his lengthy lifetime, but after his death they established in his homestead the **Abbey of St. Gall** (*Klosterhof 6A; 41-71/227-3381*), where a sun-kissed blue-and-white-interior Baroque

cathedral and a UNESCO World Heritage-listed Carolingian monastery now sit. The Benedictine monks who congregated here evolved into a community of enlightenment. The manuscripts they wrote, copied and obtained—including the Plan of St. Gall, the only surviving architectural drawing from the early Middle Ages; and some 2,100 handwritten books, ➔

Overlooking the
Abbey of St. Gall.

COURTESY OF ST. GALLEN BODENSEE TOURISM





Clockwise from top: Ornate and flower-filled façades; inside Stiftsbibliotek; lively nighttime streets.



400 of which are more than a century old—are housed at the **Stiftsbibliothek** (stibi.ch; admission CHF12). Talk about a bibliophile's dream come true: you have to don slippers to pad into this remarkable Abbey Library, Switzerland's oldest, but the reward is a polished-wood, fresco-ceilinged, golden-hued Rococo trove of parchment documents and some of the world's most valuable bibles. Keep your wows to a whisper, please.

Outside in the main square of this fairytale village, look skyward. You'll see several representatives of the 111 well-preserved, ornate (often kooky) **bay windows**, added by merchants from the 1800's to their homes as they grew rich off the skyrocketing textile industry. By 1910, at its economic peak,

St. Gallen was producing half of the embroidery in the world—learn about this sartorial history at the **Textile Museum** (textilmuseum.ch; admission CHF12), or the showrooms of some of its latter day inheritors.

For example, run your fingers through the fabrics at **Jakob Schlaepfer** (*Furstenlandstrasse 99; 41-71/274-9292*), known for designing bedazzling textiles for Louis Vuitton and Chanel, or prepare to open your wallet at **Akris** (*Felsenstrasse 40; 41-71/227-7722*), which takes women's "basics" to such perfectly cut, fanciful heights that Michelle Obama and Nicole Kidman are among its most famous fans.

In that context, the **red carpet-coated City Lounge**, several downtown blocks of benches, a car, a fountain and

all, is a logical living art example of St. Gallen's cultural evolution. Speaking of art, pop over to **Forum Würth** in neighboring Rorschach (*Churerstrasse 10, Rorschach; 41-71/225-1000*), where a small but impressive collection of modernist and contemporary works (count Picasso and Munch among the most popular draws) await on the banks of Lake Constance. On a clear day, you might make out the edges of distant Germany and Austria across the water. If you return by local tram, disembark at bucolic **St. Georgen**, a green ridge on St. Gallen's southeastern edge where you'll find sweeping valley views, two of the town's most popular swimming holes and free-roaming cows. No bears, alas, but they'll be back with that firewood any minute now. ♦

THE MOMENT

VALLE VERZASCA, TICINO

2:24 p.m.

Take a step back in time into a valley that dictates the day, while you simply enjoy a quiet hike in the wilderness. The Valle Verzasca in Ticino, due north of Milan but firmly Swiss, is an excellent rural area to explore on foot. Largely untouched by the modern world, its steep inclines and waterfalls are dotted with picturesque stone structures. As you come across the Ponti dei Salti, also known as the Roman

bridge, at Lavertezzo you'll realize that you're worlds away from the familiar. The 17th-century, double arched bridge crosses an emerald-hued River Verzasca and natural rock formations polished smooth over the centuries.

Sheltered by high mountains and at a relatively low altitude of 545 meters, the valley is a thriving home for vines, palm trees and chestnut plantations. +



The double arch stone bridge of Lavertezzo, Ticino, Switzerland.

At the hotel's
Rive Gauche
Terrace.

THE CLASSIC

LAKESHORE LIFE

With another lofty overhaul, the Baur au Lac proves that icons never stop reinventing themselves.

These days, it's practically impossible to imagine the banks of Lake Zurich bare. But that's what Johannes Baur was working with in 1844 when he envisioned what was to become his family legacy. Despite having been preceded by the luxe Baur en Ville a few blocks away, the **Baur au Lac** quickly became Zurich's grande dame,

with its sweeping lake views, private parkland, reputation for discretion and continual upgrades. A guest garage added in 1905 houses a Rolls Royce Phantom. The Terrasse Bar, though only opened in 2009, is already a Zurich institution for cocktails among the smart set. The Pavillon restaurant, centered on a lavender-

banquette, towering, flowering rotunda, might be the prettiest dining room in town, and is definitely standing tall with its new Michelin star. Now, a secretive Pierre-Yves Rochon-led overhaul of the main lobby—with a shiny glass dome and a fireplace—is primed to usher in the hotel's next incarnation.

From its origins as, not long after opening, one of the first hotels in the area to offer vintages from Bordeaux, the Baur au Lac has become a premier Swiss distributor, testifying to an enduring dedication to quality wines. Likewise, European kings and queens gave way to Haile Selassie, and Richard

Wagner was followed by the likes of Alfred Hitchcock, Audrey Hepburn and, more recently, Peter Fonda, further evidence of its enduring status as an icon. At 170 years old, the Baur au Lac has never looked younger. Here's to many more happy returns. *bauraulac.ch.*
—JENINNE LEE-ST. JOHN



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February 2015



LAURYN ISHAK

On the trails high
above Lucerne,
page 58.

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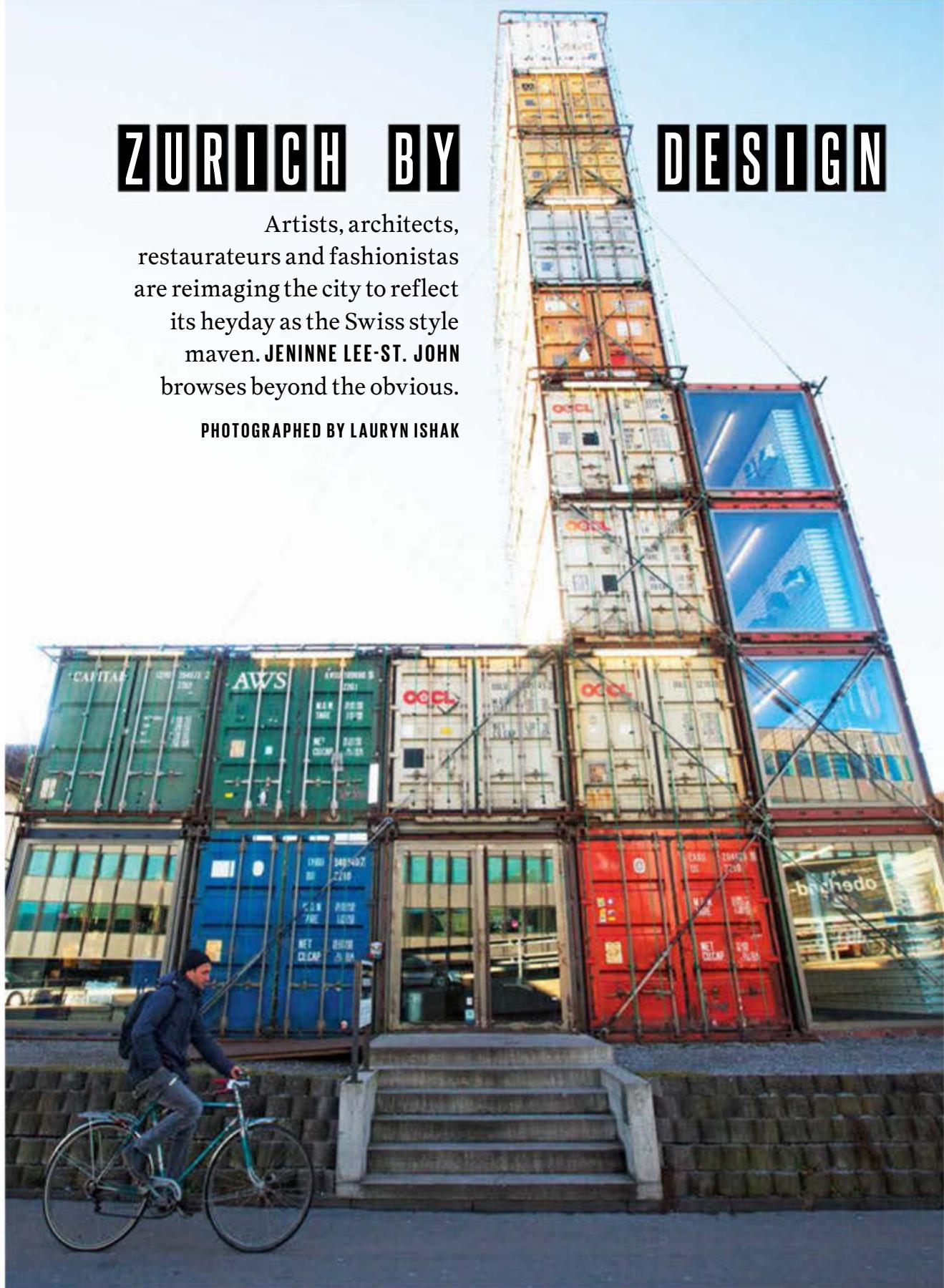


A day out in Zurich West. **Opposite:** Also in Zurich West, the Freitag store made from old containers.

ZURICH BY DESIGN

Artists, architects, restaurateurs and fashionistas are reimaging the city to reflect its heyday as the Swiss style maven. **JENINNE LEE-ST. JOHN** browses beyond the obvious.

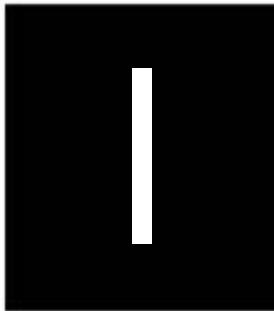
PHOTOGRAPHED BY LAURYN ISHAK





Clockwise from left:
A fruit tart not to be
missed; one of the
funky stores in
Zurich West; shade
from the summer
sun; atop Clouds
restaurant; local
fashion for sale;
sailboats in Zurich.





F YOU'VE NEVER HEARD of Ulrich Zwingli, please smooth your tie or straighten those ribbons in your hair. Give thanks to this xenophobic, anti-mercenary, unlikely leader of the Swiss Reformation for his unwitting role in making Zurich an essential link in the global silk route—and subsequently

the design capital of Switzerland that it is today. Though essentially lost to history in the shadow of Luther and Calvin, Zwingli was a fiery, controversial preacher who got local leaders on his side (and was eventually elected to join their ranks) with, among other things, his leading role in The Affair of the Sausages, in which he and like-minded pastors handed out, yes, sausages on the first Sunday of Lent, 1522, in blatant violation of Catholic fasting rules.

Obviously, after that it was only a matter of time before the city and several of its neighbors jumped on the Protestant pork wagon. Religious refugees from Italian-speaking Locarno, in Ticino at the foot of the Alps, flocked to Zurich seeking safe haven. They, and the Huguenots who came after 1685 and were welcomed despite being French, brought with them a zeal for weaving textiles, silk in particular, and skill for building and—most importantly—improving looms. The city's direct route to Italy only boosted this sartorial trade, and reams of silks and cottons flowed out of Zurich like so much crisp, clean Swiss water until World War I.

A staid city known for banking isn't necessarily the first place you'd think of as a design capital, but to this end the textile industry had a two-fold effect: by, first, over the centuries, imbuing Zurich with a strong style sensibility, and by, second, eventually fading out, leaving some of its factories and warehouses among those in the west now being repurposed as the city's coolest-looking boutiques, restaurants, bars, galleries and theaters.



ZURICH WEST ISN'T ACTUALLY NEW TO THE ROLE OF the city's it-spot. Creative-types started moving in, gutting and reimaging back in the 1990's. But it's spreading to neighboring no-man's lands so that one wonders if soon shipping containers-cum-fairy lit bars will be abutting 500-year-old stone buildings on the other side of town. Frau Gerold's Garten, on the far southeastern edge, is made up of two shipping containers holding a bar and kitchen, sweeping outdoor marquees and a mural-wrapped

wooden-crate garden for the locavore in all of us, all topped by twinkling Christmas lights.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Because the first thing you notice about Zurich West is the Prime Tower. Particularly to those of us in skyscraper-happy Asia, the fact that this 36-story building is the tallest in the entire country seems hilarious (from my desk in Bangkok, I can see at least 11 that are taller—and that's only because it's dark out). However, this all-glass, angular oddball towers above anything else in the city and you can understand why the developers were forced to erect it in Zurich West.

It has two great things going for it. One is the ultra-classy Clouds, up on the top floor, whose bistro, smoking room and bar—as well as tiered, white-tablecloth dining room (in which I enjoyed, during the year's brief hunting season, fresh and bloody venison)—to take in the panorama of the cobblestoned, leafy city, stretching all the way down to shimmery Lake Zurich. The other is Hotel Rivington & Sons on the backside of the tower's ground level. The Art Deco lines, white-tile walls and banker's lights, among other period accents, make it an impeccable reproduction of an old-New York tavern. I was cozy on a black leather banquette and felt like I was at home. If I hadn't just had that venison upstairs, I would have ordered pancakes and hash browns.

Radiating from the Prime Tower is, I suppose, the real Zurich West: warehouses, mills, factories all housing some of the hippest places to be in the city. Naturally, this is where they put Swiss Argentine designer Alfredo Häberli's 25hours Hotel, a super playful, polychrome adult romper room made for mingling. In the neighborhood, there's also the ingenious Shiffbau, a performance space housing three different theaters, including one in the old loading dock. There are industrial-chic restaurants (skylit LaSalle) and dark-fairy-tale eateries (Gnusserai, making playful use of its origins as a foundry). There are bars, oh-so-many bars you wish you had several summer nights to wallow in the divey, wonderful urban trendiness of them all. A particular favorite is the also retro-designed ostensible jazz club Moods, which hosts international musicians of everything from Afro-soul to indie-pop to polka.

There's also the Viaductmarkt. Built within the arches of the old viaduct are boutiques and cafés as notable for the designs and eats they peddle as their clever location, the very definition of architectural upcycling. What a logical progression from that trendiest of Swiss exports, the truck tarps-into-satchels Freitag, whose flagship shipping container tower looms over Zurich West.

The newbie neighborhood, however, by no means has a monopoly on style. Even a wander through Aldstadt, Old Town, uncovers a treasure trove of modern ideas. Limmetquai and the hive of windy streets leading up the hill away from it house a clutch of boutiques that feel like mini-Urban Outfitters if it only carried quirky Made-in-Switzerland designs. On the left bank of the Limmet River, sandwiched between the water and the Bahnhofstrasse is



THERE ARE BARS, OH-SO-MANY BARS, YOU NEED SEVERAL NIGHTS

From top:
Ordering drinks on a late-summer night; outside Im Viadukt, a market hall underneath the railway. Opposite: Along the romantic streets of the old town.





Lindenholz, the core of the city. Here, among the Fraumünster, a church built on the remains of a nunnery that ruled the city for 500 years (that's right, an abbess, a woman held the purse strings and the power in Zurich as far back at 856 AD—maybe they don't need help modernizing after all) and the sundry remains of the pre-Roman era, you'll find an embankment full of cute shops, including Lederladen, where former finance guy Adrian Zürcher hand-crafts leather satchels and other accessories in a fishbowl shop and, closer to town, the worthwhile Widder Hotel.

This 42-room boutique is nothing short of a marvel. It is within the renovated interior of nine buildings that date to the Middle Ages and were owned variously by noblemen, artisans, merchants and guildmasters—including the Guild of the Ram, the butchers' association, which bought its house in 1401. The buildings are connected as seamlessly as possible. Which is to say: not very seamlessly but very cool. The rooms are each different, done in rich woods, bright whites, whatever, with a unifying element being gorgeous exposed beams. Also, there's a Warhol (*Widder* or *Ram*, naturally), along with an open cache of other paintings and objets d'art with which to interact. Think hotel as sculpture garden.

Another high-design accommodation that succeeds at both maintaining the past in its present and being two things at once is the new b2 boutique hotel and connected Thermalbad Irish-Roman bathhouse that was once the Hurlimann Brewery. In some ways they've simply preserved the old; for example, an event space that was the brewing room still has steel tanks and a brewmaster's hidey-hole. In others, they've recycled—green beer bottles make up the spectacular chandeliers in the library bar—and re-imagined (the basement barrel-filling grottoes are again filled with barrels, but barrels containing massive swimming pools and spas). And in still others, they've reinterpreted the space to fit current times: an earthquake-proofing law led to the zigzag reinforced chimney of sorts that both grounds the building and, snaking its way up to a skylight that emerges in the center of the rooftop pool, acts as its central design element.

JOSEFWEISE IS LITERALLY THE wrong side of the tracks. From downtown Zurich and the glittering Bahnhofstrasse, you have to go all the way around the thick serpent of train lines that feeds the Hauptbahnhof (incidentally, center of the efficient Swiss train system and yet another reason why Zurich

was so good at trade). It's a small town, but that's kind of far. That's probably why a slew of edgy boutiques, designers and second-hand shops have colonized the neighborhood.

It was here that I found Barekunst, an organic café, wine bar and independent art gallery. I also stumbled across the

fashion-forward lifestyle shop The Gloss and bespoke Barcelonan designer Javier Alsamendi. Then there's the Freulein Frech Concept Store, purveyor of limited-edition, local-workshop-made fashions and jewelry, and Manu Propria handcrafted eyewear (people in Zurich love wearing glasses, even, especially, when they don't need them). In that quiet, gritty grid of streets that feels like Manhattan's Lower East Side I also found the decidedly ungritty Little Black Dress, and one of its designers, the utterly adorable Eliane Diethelm, dashing out the door to a meeting. Zurich Fashion Days was six weeks away.

Thirty-ish Diethelm and partner Joanna Skocylas specialize in that item of clothing that is every girl's must-have, often making only one per size of each design; the versatile, flattering pieces in their ready-to-wear lines might be available 15 per size, if you're lucky. The small scale is partly because of the women's dedication to high-quality, fair-condition production within Europe (some pieces are made in Ticino, others Bosnia), and partly because in a town of only 370,000 people all consumed with fashion, who wants to be seen in someone else's dress?

Or, if Andrea Hinnen has any say, who wants to be dressed just like everyone else? "I hate these black-and-gray-and-white-dressed people!" Yeah, no kidding. Hinnen, who studied and worked as a textile designer in New York for seven years spends part of every winter practicing ayurveda in Sri Lanka, and it shows loud and clear in her clothes. Walking into her shop is a shock to the system: hot pinks and lime greens everywhere, neon mermaids on teeny bikinis, and more tunics and other resort wear than a boutique in Bali. I hadn't realized the sensory deficit I'd been experiencing in Zurich—someone who loves colors and patterns, who lives in Technicolor Bangkok—until that moment: everyone here wears black.

"This is a bank city," Hinnen sniffs. (This fact influences more than just the fashion. When the tatted-up bartender at sweet-as-pie yet tongue-in-cheek brunch spot Zum Guten Glück told me "I would very much like to give you this beer," my friend, an American expat, cooed that it was the first time he'd seen anyone get anything for free in five years living in Zurich.) "The bankers are all in black. The people like colors but they're shy about wearing it," Hinnen tells me. Still, people are not only starting to get the hang of it, they're diving headlong into Hinnen's hand-painted patterns, which she has produced in Spain.

It makes sense that if someone who usually wears black is going to spend up to CHF400 on a single item of clothing from not-a-huge-name designer, they might want something as loud and against-type as possible. Hinnen agrees—"when I do the crazy colors and bold patterns, I do better"—then proceeds to sell me a pair of her exorbitantly priced Aquabot brand giant-elephant-print swim trunks. "I want to give color to the people," she says. Or, rather, sell it to them for a small fortune. But I guess that's Zurich since the days of Zwingli and his inadvertent immigrants: fashion and finance... and sausages. ♦



Clockwise from far left: Andrea Hinnen and Aquabot; chocolate truffles; modern and local designs for sale; a lifestyle shop built into an old arch.



'PEOPLE LIKE COLORS BUT ARE SHY ABOUT WEARING THEM'

T+L Guide

STAY

25hours Hotel Zurich West Pfingstweidstrasse 102; 41-44/577-2255; 25hours-hotels.com; doubles from CHF160.

Widder Hotel Rennweg 7; 41-44/224-2526; widderhotel.ch; doubles from CHF795.

B2 Boutique Hotel and Thermalbad Spa Hurlimann Areal, Brandschenkestrasse 152; 41-44/567-6767; b2boutiquehotels.com; doubles from CHF310.

EAT + DRINK

Frau Gerold's Garten Geroldstrasse 23; frauagerold.ch; dinner for two CHF70.

Clouds Prime Tower, Maagplatz 5; 41-44/404-3000; clouds.ch; prix fixe CHF210.

Hotel Rivington & Sons

Hardstrasse 201; 41-43/366-9082; hotelrivingtonandsons.ch; dinner for two CHF80.

LaSalle Schiffbaustrasse 4; 41-44/258-7071; lasalle-restaurant.ch; dinner for two CHF130.

Gnusserei Giessereistrasse 18, Im Puls 5; 41-44/440-0001; gnusserei.ch; dinner for two CHF160.

Moods Schiffbaustrasse 6; 41-44/276-8000; moods.ch.

Barekunst Josefstrasse 27; 41-43/243-8310; barekunst.ch; set menus from CHF21.50.

Zum Guten Glück Stationstrasse 7; 41-43/540-7299; zumgutenglueck.ch; set lunch from CHF16.50.

SHOP

Viaductmarkt im-viadukt.ch.

Lederladen Schipfe 29; 41-44/221-1954; lederladen.ch.

Freitag Geroldstrasse 17; 41-43/366-9520; freitag.ch.

The Gloss Hardstrasse 312; 41-44/271-3806; thegloss.ch.

Javier Alsamendi Limmatstrasse 215; alsamendi.com.

Freulein Frech Concept Store

Josefstrasse 48; 41-44/271-2020; freuleinfrech.com.

Manu Propria Josefstrasse 50; 41-44/271-0444; manupropria.ch.

Little Black Dress Josefstrasse 45; 41-43/540-1670; littleblackdress.ch.

Andrea Hinnen and Aquabot Rotwandstrasse 53; 41-44/240-0212; andrehinnen.com.



THE ALPS ON ADRENALINE

THRILL-SEEKERS, OUTDOOR
JUNKIES AND NATURE-LOVERS
HAVE BEEN DRAWN TO INTERLAKEN
FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY.
DIANA HUBBELL LOOKS INTO THIS
ALPINE LAND'S ENIGMATIC ALLURE.



Paragliding
above Interlaken.





‘HOW WILL I KNOW WHEN TO JUMP?’ I ASK, TRYING TO SOUND BRAVER THAN I FEEL.

“You don’t jump, you sit,” Werner, my guide and lifeline for the day says in his thick Swiss-German accent. He has a grizzled, sun-scoured face and wisps of hair bleached blonde from so much time aloft. This is a man who has been paragliding his whole life, who has made that fateful leap more than 5,000 times. On his days off, he stows his parachute in a backpack, straps on crampons and scales the higher slopes solo to jump from where most don’t dare venture.

Yet, as I watch him methodically arranging our rainbow-hued chute I feel my stomach twist. The grass drops off sharply just steps from where we stand and beyond it is the valley with its twin glassy lakes, green meadows and red-roofed houses a thousand meters below. Towering over all of this are the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau.

The Ogre, the Monk and the Virgin. Sheer rock faces capped with solid gleaming blue ice, they are as foreboding as they are beautiful. It is easy to see how they inspired poetic names and how they have become an obsession for so many. The 1,800-meter north face of Eiger, the highest on the Continent, is one of the greatest climbing challenges in the world. Nicknamed Mordwand, or “Murder Wall,” it has claimed more than 64 lives since the foolish and the fearless began attempting to scale its slopes in 1935. The final stretch is a web of deadly crevasses and unstable chasms ominously known as “The White Spider.”

In spite of the danger, or perhaps because of it, people continue to come. Like local legend Takio Kato, the first person to lead a team up the north face’s most difficult, direct route in 1969; like Ueli Steck, who first free-climbed it alone in 2008; or Dani Arnold who then broke Steck’s speed record in 2011 by clamoring up in two hours and 28 minutes, at times sprinting through the freezing, thin oxygen.

These mountains were what drew me here, just as they attracted wealthy Victorians to the area more than a century ago. They’re the



Natural beauty is around every corner when hiking.

Opposite: At lower levels, summer colors abound.

FLORA AND FAUNA GIVE

reason for Europe's highest railroad and the graceful colonial-style hotels dotting the landscape. Without these haunting, hostile, geological obelisks the town of Interlaken would be nothing but a speck on the map. Without them, I wouldn't be standing here, heart in my throat, waiting to rush into the void.

"Are you worried?" Werner asks with a devilish grin. "Don't be. You're flying *luxus*—first class all the way, baby. A couple weeks ago, I went paragliding from there." He points to the sharp, white point of Jungfrau, 4,158 meters above sea level.

I want to protest that my version of first class usually comes with soft pillows and free champagne, but before I can open my mouth we're racing forward. Down, down we go on the increasingly vertiginous slope, until my legs are wheeling about like Wile E. Coyote. There is no way to go forward. Instead, I sit back.

Wind rushes into our sails and buoys us. We are weightless, floating feather light and free above it all. My *luxus* seat is a whole lot more comfortable than it looks and suddenly the experience goes from terrifying to thrilling. We plunge and swoop, diving perilously fast, then rising back up again as we catch a thermal off the side of an intimidating rock face. We curve in great arcs, rushing up into the deep blue sky.

The Jungfraubahn was built more than a century ago, back when a train that could climb more than 2,000 meters into the heavens must have been a mechanical marvel. It took 14 years of blasting through solid granite to construct it. The rail workers spent so long in these remote alpine landscapes that they brought their families from Italy to live with them. A glimpse into the sepia-toned photographs of the era shows pale-faced, unsmiling women in oversized hats and small, serious children dwelling high above the clouds.

You'd never guess the age of the route by looking at these smartly outfitted machines though. Their bright paint jobs have a certain retro charm and they purr along with modern efficiency. Hybrid technology renders them ecologically sensible as well. Hydroelectricity from torrents of melting glacial water powers these little engines that could, and the reserved brake energy from each two trains trips is enough to power a third.



WAY TO ROCK AND SNOW

Today, these sleek, metallic workhouses ferry 5,000 visitors a day to Jungfraujoch, appropriately dubbed the Top of Europe thanks to its 3,454-meter elevation. The journey is an impossibly scenic one. As we ascend, we pass vast meadows where doe-eyed cows stare at us through long lashes. Gradually, the flora and fauna give way to barren rock and patches of snow. The 22-kilometer Aletsch Glacier glistens in the near-blinding sunlight.

On the way up, my guide Yuki Eymann regales me with tales of local icons. Most of her friends are second- or third-generation climbers, part of ongoing dynasties who trace their lineage back to Interlaken's earliest daredevils. Two in particular, a brother and a sister, lost their mother while she was free-climbing on the Mordwand. Instead of running away, the siblings remain inexorably drawn to the mountain, fearlessly snowboarding off-piste on Eiger's precipitous slopes.

Yuki herself hails from Japan, though she now calls the nearby town of Grindelwald home. A slender woman with unruly waves of dark hair, she barely comes up to my shoulder yet hauls her bulging backpack as if it weighs nothing. She's swished down powdery slopes from Niseko to Aspen with her husband and three kids, and climbed back up them with her bear of a Bernese mountain dog. For a wedding present, she received heliskiing tickets. The day before she met me, she ran Interlaken's infamous marathon—43 kilometers and more than a thousand meters of elevation climb over dirt alpine trails.

I ask her if it was tough and she shrugs. No big deal.

You've been eating the wrong fondue. It's cool, I didn't know any better either. The simple fact of the matter is that this glorious cauldron of molten dairy is a different beast in its native land. It's richer, creamier and boozy enough to induce a swoon. As a waiter one evening tells me in his haughty Parisian accent, "I am from France, yes? But even in France, I do not order fondue because it is crap. Once you have had the real Swiss fondue, all others are crap."

It all comes down to the ingredients, the list of which is succinct and fiercely debated. Wild mushrooms, tomato sauce, chilies, heavy cream, truffles and various liquors may be added, but in its purest

form, this dish consists of two cheeses, a dry white and a whisper of garlic. Most outsiders are familiar with *neuchâteloise*, that classic blend of Gruyère and Emmental, but during my journey I become a fast convert to the *moitié-moitié* way of doing things. By swapping out Emmental for unctuous Fribourg Vacherin, a mountain cheese with hints of the wild flowers, this elemental dish reaches a nearly transcendent state.

It's also rather, well, odiferous, shall we say, which is why more than a few restaurants in Interlaken insist that aficionados savor their fondue alfresco. On golden autumnal days, the streets line up with hikers fueling up on hearty Swiss fare. They dine on slabs of raclette garnished with cornichons to live piano at the grand old Café Schuh or head to the trendier OX Restaurant & Grill for locally raised steaks served with miniature cast iron skillets of rösti. The well-heeled frequent The Victoria Jungfrau Grand Hotel & Spa for high tea. The place was a bastion of luxury long before the rest of the town mushroomed into an alpine hot spot and it still bears the gracious British-style service it has maintained for generations.

All of my meals on the ground, delicious though they may have been, could never quite equal the one at the end of my train journey to Jungfraujoch. At the end of more than two hours of near-continuous climbing, of being propelled through the dark heart of the Eiger, Yuki and I emerge into an unreal world of endless winter. After several silent, stunned minutes of inhaling brittle, frigid air and struggling to completely absorb one of the world's greatest panoramas, we head inside.

We cross through the Ice Palace, a tunnel 30 meters through the glacier where translucent sculptures of eagles and bears watch passing visitors. We hurry through to Crystal Restaurant and snag one of the coveted window seats.

Maybe it's the lack of oxygen, or maybe it's the shot of surprisingly smooth glacial whiskey—aged in barrels up in Jungfrau's icy passageways—but after a few minutes, I'm feeling woozy. The white landscape outside softens and takes on an even more surreal quality.

Yuki can see me staring, slack-jawed, at the scene she passes by almost daily. She understands.

"You see what I mean? Once you've lived here, it's hard to live anywhere else. How do you give this up?" she asks softly.

Captain Phil is disappointed in me.

"I can't believe you're not going canyoning," he says, shaking his scruffy, bearded face. He reaches over the side of the boat with a plastic cup, scoops up some lake water and passes it to me to drink. I'm no longer surprised that it tastes better than anything I ever sipped from a bottle. "The canyoning here is unbelievable."

The problem is, so are too many other things. Visitors are spoiled for choice. It's easy to see how so many end up staying on months or years after they had planned to leave.

At the moment, I'm sitting in a motor boat on Lake Brienz, gaping at the 500-meter waterfalls and thickly forested shores. In a few days, I've trekked to Kleine Scheidegg at the foot of Eiger's North Wall; I've taken in the scenery from up on Harder Kulm; I've wandered the medieval streets of the nearby city of Thun. Yet it's still not enough.

"Don't worry. You'll make it next time. There's always a next time. People come back, or they just stay, like me," my captain says, as he prepares to head back to town. Looking up at the Ogre, Monk and Virgin, I don't need to ask why. ♦



T+L Guide

STAY

Metropole Hotel

Interlaken The only high-rise in the area with impressive views of the mountains. Höheweg 37, Interlaken; 41-33/828-6666; metropole-interlaken.ch; doubles from CHF109.

Victoria Jungfrau

Grand Hotel & Spa Interlaken's original grande dame still sports colonial opulence. Höheweg 41, Interlaken; 41-33/828-2828; victoria-jungfrau.ch; doubles from CHF382.

EAT

OX Restaurant & Grill

Am Marktplatz, Interlaken; 41-33/828-1220; ox-interlaken.ch; dinner for two CHF70.

Restaurant Taverne

Höheweg 74, Interlaken; 41-33/826-6868; hotelinterlaken.ch; dinner for two CHF80.

Café Schuh

Don't be dissuaded by the international scope of this menu, which includes

Lebanese and Thai

dishes—it serves one of the best fondues in town. Dinners in the evening are accompanied by live piano music. Höheweg 56, 3800 Interlaken; 41-33/888-8050; schuh-interlaken.ch; dinner for two CHF60.

Hüsi Bierhaus

Popular craft brew house with more than 50 lagers, ales and ciders, including 12 on tap. Postgasse 3, Interlaken; 41-33/823-2332; huesi-interlaken.ch; drinks for two CHF13.

Crystal Restaurant

Jungfraujoch; 41-33/828-7888; gletscherrestaurant.ch; dinner for two CHF80.

SEE + DO

Jetboat Interlaken

Rugenparkstrasse 11, Interlaken; 41-78/845-5699; jetboat.ch; individual boat tours from CHF99 per person.

Star Paragliding

Höhenmatte, 3800 Sundlauenen; 41-79/354-5251; flystar.ch; tandem flights from CHF170.

MAYBE IT'S THE
LACK OF OXYGEN OR
THE SHOT OF GLACIAL
WHISKEY, BUT I'M
FEELING WOOZY



A remote valley
view near Davos.



BIG LITTLE COUNTRY



ALTRENDO TRAVEL/GETTY IMAGES

Swiss icons might have a different meaning than they did two centuries ago, but the idea of a Grand Tour is just as relevant and a much easier journey to pull off. **BY PETER MORGAN**

i

In August 1766, a 10-year-old Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart played a series of concerts in Geneva, Lausanne and Zurich. Along with his family, the musical genius—he was already composing pieces, some of which have been lost to time—was approaching the end of a three-year Grand Tour of Europe, and nearing his Salzburg home. The notion of Grand Tours started in the mid-17th century but flourished with rail travel in the 1840s. In the manner that Mozart and his family showed, Grand Tours were meant to take in the cultural icons of the Continent, whether through architecture, works of art or concerts. These journeys, which often lasted years, represented the first form of group travel.

Today, the Alpine nation has become much easier to visit with the Grand Tour of Switzerland travel program. Launching this spring, it's a 1,600-kilometer route north to south and east to west that reveals the best the country has to offer visitors touring by car or public transport.

The suggested route navigates dynamic cities, towering Alpine peaks, picturesque half-timbered villages, vineyard-carpeted hill country, pristine lakes and historical sites. With a nod to drama, the program's designers have built in at least one sightseeing highlight per day.

Switzerland's here-to-there infrastructure, from the ribbons of highways crisscrossing the country to city streets and extensive rail and coach systems, is designed to facilitate the ease of mobility for visitors. While the Grand Tour of Switzerland itinerary is intended for both private and public transport, its length and the remoteness of some of the sights make it particularly suitable for self-drive holidaymakers. This is good news because Switzerland is perhaps the easiest and safest country for an extended self-drive road trip.

With typical Swiss efficiency, the roads and transit points on the tour route are clearly sign-posted with bright red plaques, and there are fuel stations and clean rest areas at regular intervals. The circuit has been carefully planned to avoid, when possible, high-speed motorways and favors scenic back roads with the best views.

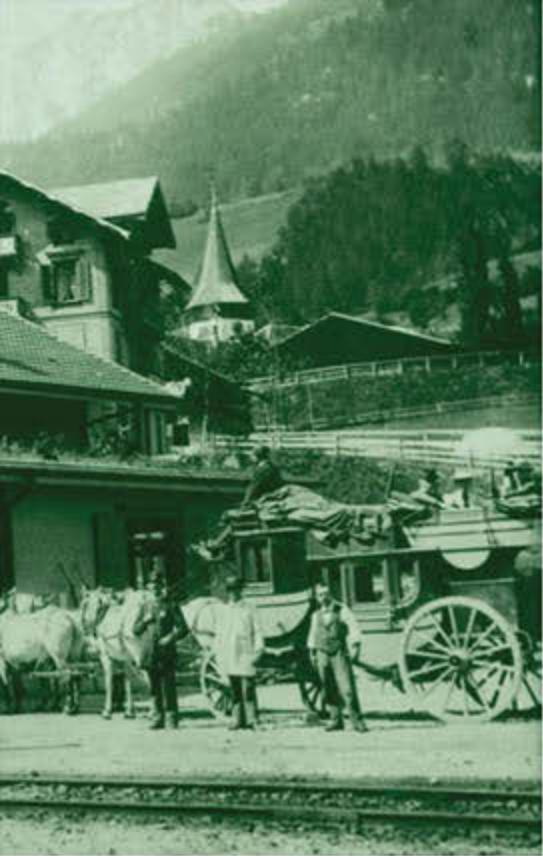
Those who choose the public transport option over self-drive will cover much of the same ground by trains, ferries and coaches. The Swiss Travel System has developed a train tour called the Grand Train Tour of Switzerland (see page 12) and is also working with Eurobus to design a tour aboard luxury coaches.

Whichever way you choose to explore—your own vehicle or public transport—the experience will leave you with memories that will last for years.

The suggested starting points for tours are the entry-point cities of Basel, Geneva and Lugano, but you can pick it up almost anywhere. The itinerary is flexible and its length can be tailored to meet individual interests, schedules and



“SWITZERLAND
WOULD BE A MIGHTY
BIG PLACE IF
IT WERE
IRONED FLAT”



Clockwise from left: Grand Tours once meant train travel; the banks of the Rhine in Basel; a ticket taker from days past.



budgets. The best time to visit is during the warmer months of May to October to ensure all mountain passes are open and car-to-rail transfers are operating.

The most relevant reason to travel from one place to another is to see what's in between, and the tour takes great pleasure in doing just that. The itinerary covers all 23 santons and—as in Mozart's day—showcases the best of Swiss art, culture, architecture and natural beauty. In all, it guides visitors to 37 tourist highlights, seven cities, eight outstanding nature spots, through five alpine passes, alongside 22 lakes and 13 UNESCO-World Heritage Sites.

Switzerland Tourism's web site (MySwitzerland.com) has all the tools and modern-day icons intrepid travelers need to organize their own, unique journey. The site has options for side trips, links to hotels and car-rental companies, and offers travel packages. When connecting, you are automatically logged into a real-time chat session with a travel specialist. My helper, "Heidi," messaged me with "Hello and welcome to Switzerland Tourism. We remain at your disposal for any questions."

The site has an easy-to-use interactive map that indicates the location of hotels, major attractions, lakes and even swimming pools across the country. Choosing a hotel and booking a room is just clicks away. Simply follow your proposed route on the map and hotels are displayed. Hover over the hotel icon and a photo and the name of the hotel appears. Want more? Click the hotel name for a comprehensive information page with description, star rating, availability, location, a booking link and much more.

The navigation allows you to pre-filter the type of accommodation you want (hotel, apartment, camp site, or group and youth hostel) and its star rating. Those traveling in groups can specify that only hotels with a set number of rooms be displayed.

Checking out the major tourist sights is just as simple. Icons on the map indicate the location of an attraction. Hover above it and a photo and name appears. Click and be taken to a page with full details. For example, a click on the Baur Collection in Geneva takes you to a page with a full description of the museum, its history, location, opening hours, contact numbers and so on. The technology will go a long way in ending a traveler's frustration on arriving at a museum or landmark only to discover it's closed that day or under renovation.

The site also has dozens of useful free travel apps for downloading. For example, the "Make My Switzerland" app provides recommendations from local ambassadors on hidden gems and attractions in Basel, Bern, Geneva, Lausanne, Lucerne, Lugano and Zurich. The "Tales of the City" app for iPads lists cultural attractions, sightseeing tips and helps to plan the perfect weekend in 23 Swiss cities.

The "Best Swiss Hotels" app (available for smartphones and iPads) is a mobile version of the online hotel-booking program. You simply pick your preferences using the filters for the type and quality of hotel, add your location and the app searches a pool of 500 hotels to provide the best matches. You can then book directly from the mobile device.

American writer Mark Twain once quipped, "Switzerland would be a mighty big place if it were ironed flat." That sentiment still holds true. The Grand Tour of Switzerland program takes the "bigness" out of Switzerland and makes planning to explore this country's high Alpine meadows, serene lakes, and charming towns and cities as easy as clicking an icon. +



A chapel perches
atop Mount Pilatus.

Storybook Lucerne

IN THE SERENE SWISS HEARTLAND, A SHORT STROLL CAN TAKE
YOU BACK 1,000 YEARS. FROM MOUNTAIN TOP AND RIVER BEND,
JENINNE LEE-ST. JOHN DRINKS IN THE TRADITIONS.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY LAURYN ISHAK



What a pleasant discovery to visit Lucerne and find it as wholesome in the flesh and sometimes in its 1,700-year-old stones as the brand of milk by the same name I drank growing up. The storybook town of medieval churches and crooked squares, fresco-facades, covered bridges and a line of lookout turrets is ringed by green hills and towering mountains. These inform, ironically, Lucerne's historic role as a trading center, but also, of course, its more recent one as tourist magnet.

It's Mount Rigi, a 25-minute train ride away, that best encapsulates this wholesome Swiss heartland. On an unseasonably warm September afternoon, I took a nostalgia-inducing cogwheel train (Europe's first, having opened in 1871) from the tiny lakeside town of Vitznau climbing through farmlands, around A-frame houses, past brooks, up 1,798 meters to the summit, Rigi Kulm, where the most spectacular panorama awaited. From the top, it felt like the mountain was melting down into the three glassy lakes—Lucerne, Zuger and Lauerz—below. It felt like Rigi's 120-odd kilometers of walking trails were all conquerable, with the right walking stick and a little gumption. It felt like someone had taken a glass dome and placed it on top of the entire region, leaving us tourists in the world's biggest and most beautiful snow globe.

My walk from the peak was dotted by wildflowers. I ran up little hillocks and tumbled down the other sides. I passed more than a few couples sunning and snuggling in their own slices of heaven, hidden by high grasses and the sheer vastness of the space. I spent an inordinate amount of time contemplating three cows munching in a meadow, the brass bells around their necks tinkling with every bob of the head while I wondered how, and more importantly, why a cow would amble that high. (The one who held my gaze for a full minute was probably thinking the same thing about me.) I stopped in



at the Chaserenholz dairy, a working farm where you slip on blue booties to visit the salivation-inducing-scented cheese making facility. I had a beer on a terrace while watching little kids fling themselves down a slide built into a cliffside. I wished I'd had more time with Rigi, had perhaps booked a night at one of the 14 inns on the mountain, such as that of Familie Flury-Mehr, where you can sleep on old-school straw beds.

Sure, "a bed of straw" probably only sounds good through a rustic-romantic prism. But I doubt I was alone in that line of thinking: the descent to the station at Arth-Goldau was marked by a sense of weariness and pining. It felt like the proverbial gray cloud hovered over the entire train. What a lovely day, everyone seemed to be thinking. Why did it have to end so soon?

THROUGHOUT MY SEVERAL SUN-KISSED autumn days in and around Lucerne, everyone marveled at the weather—August had been unrelentingly rainy and the whole city was bummed at the prospect of entering the long, dark winter without having bathed in a proper summer. Bathed is the perfect word for this city on the lake, where a five-minute sail from the inner harbor area takes you past coastlines full of people swimming off little docks, public beaches, anywhere the mood strikes, for their morning constitutionals or after-work refreshers, even as the air was taking on a chill.

I was there in a bridge season, and lucky me. The Swiss were packing in their last summer fun, so the lake was filled with sailboats, the sidewalk café culture inherited from their Italian trade partners was in full swing (sit on

Lake Lucerne through the trees.
Opposite: Iconic Chapel Bridge.

the Reuss River at Hotel les Balances' classy-cool restaurant and toast the sunshine with a local Riesling), the shorelines were rimmed with people jogging and drinking and playing boules.

This is the land of water, water everywhere, and so many drops to drink. Go on, put your empty bottle into the stream of any city fountain; they're all perfectly potable. Speaking of streams, Lake Lucerne flows into the Reuss, and its old needle dam is ingenious in its simplicity. Standing like soldiers on the line, porous wooden paddles hold back the water flow, and are inserted or removed by hand to maintain the level of the lake. This "technology" is 150 years old and I'm not sure whether they've kept it more because it still does the job or because it's so beautiful.

St. Leodegar, whose two pointy witch-hat spires stretch to the clouds, sits on the site of the eighth-century monastery founded near the town's original Roman settlement. A thousand years ago, a bridge was needed to connect the priests with the market; now it's pretty a 10-minute stroll along the landfilled lakefront. Bridges remain integral to the city's identity, though, straddling as it does both banks of the Reuss. Strolling across the two covered bridges—Chapel Bridge, built in 1333 and the oldest covered bridge in Europe; and Mill Bridge—is transporting. Clopping along the wooden planks below, watching taller folks duck slightly when passing the historic, triangular-shaped oil paintings wedged into the rafters above, you wonder if the city and the lake are paintings themselves, since in every direction you can spy them only between hand-rail and roof-eave.

Catholic holdout Lucerne resisted the Protestant reformation by importing Jesuits to take charge of educating the young. Their efforts were rewarded with the large, lovely, waterside baroque church built in 1666. Hope that you happen to wander in when the organist is practicing, have a seat in a pew and look up: the pinks and golds and baby blues on the white, light-filled ceiling and walls make you feel like you're sitting in an inverted wedding cake.

In a way, that's apt, for it was on the banks of Lake Lucerne where the cantons of Schwyz, Unterwalden and Uri made their vows forming the original Swiss union back in 1291, inducting the city of Lucerne into the pact soon after. Residents of this region are fiercely proud of their role in birthing Switzerland, in defense against the Hapsburgs, those cruel oppressors who made William Tell shoot that apple off his son's head. I took a beautiful old paddle steamer through a shroud of morning mist, past castles and around headlands, to the park-encircled

town of Brunnen to visit the Victorinox company. After I assembled my own Swiss Army Knife, my guide and I talked history and topography. She was simply aghast when I suggested that the 1848 adoption of its federal constitution marked the founding of modern Switzerland. "Who told you that? This country was founded here," she pointed out on the map a bank not far across the lake from Brunnen, "six-hundred years before that!"

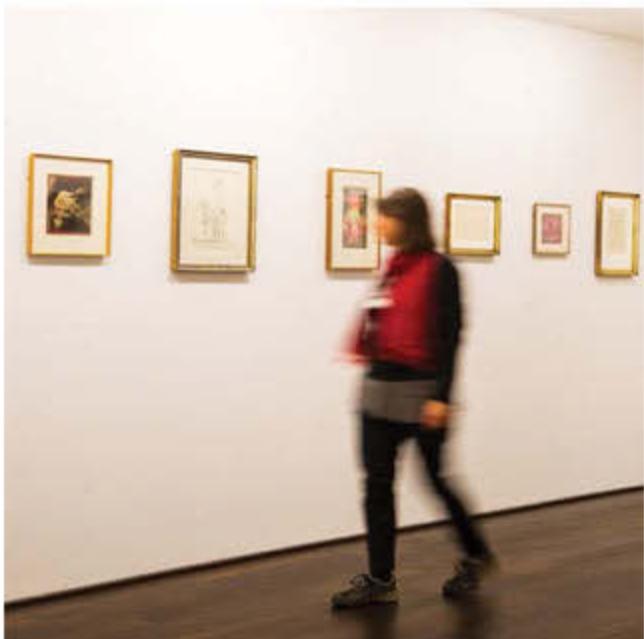
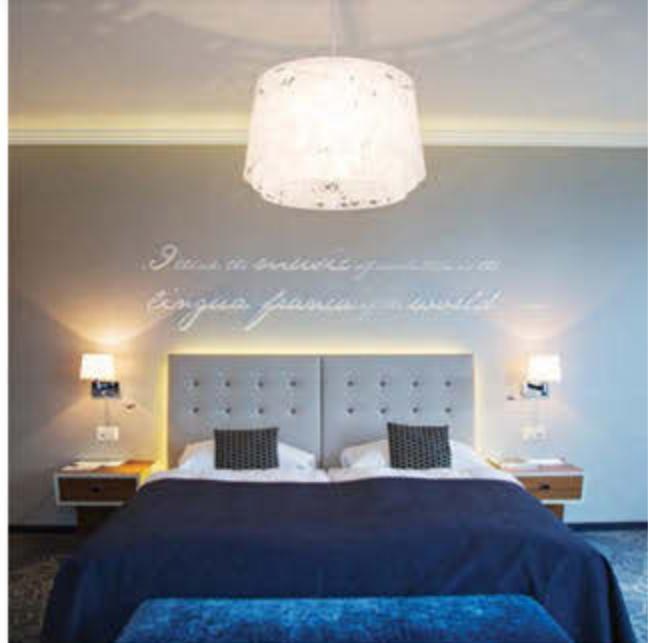
Fair enough. A defensive alliance wasn't the country's only innovation by far. For evidence, just stop by the Swiss Museum of Transport. Actually, don't "stop by"—allot about six hours to take in all the technological genius recounted in this sprawling complex dedicated to the stellar train system, as well as all other mode of movement. It's all interactive: walk beneath undercarriages, climb into cockpits. There's a planetarium, and a Disney-esque ride through the history of the country's chocolate making. And in the center of it all, an educational playground full of scooters, trucks and sailboats meant to teach the kids about everything from wind speed to types of asphalt (which is much more interesting than it sounds).

And what if the terrain you want to traverse is inhospitable to any form of transport? That would've been a great question to ask the guys who built the railroad up Mount Pilatus. Back at the beginning of the tourism boom, in 1868 Queen Victoria was carried up the 48-percent-gradient cliff face on a pallet and mules—and it became clear that there must be a better way. Engineers redesigned the standard two-wheel cog track, to a single, more stable one beneath the center of the train. The world's steepest rail line, these iconic red cars still chug up the mountain today, through hand-dynamited rock tunnels and past ibexes, albeit propelled now by electricity not steam. They also chug back down, but at a slower pace due to all the braking. And thank goodness. Try to sit in the front row, behind the conductor; it's like staring death in the face.

From the location of the hotel where Victoria holidayed, my guide for the day, Colette Richter, pointed across a clear cerulean sky this way to the Alps and the road to Italy, that way to France, thither to Germany. It was easy to see how here in the clouds, 2,119 meters up between earth and heaven, a queen might find solace and recovery from her beloved husband's death. It was enough to make a girl need a drink.

ON THE HOTEL PILATUS KULM SUN TERRACE, over a local white as crisp as the air ("It's just like with men," Richter quipped when the waiter

Opposite, clockwise from top left: The changing seasons in Lucerne; a funky, modern room at Hotel Schweizerhof; the dome of Jesuit Church; fondue is popular in Lucerne; a Paul Klee exhibit in the city; and the Lowendenkmal monument.



A scenic view of a red train winding through a mountainous landscape. The train, consisting of a red locomotive and several red passenger cars, is seen from a distance, moving along a track that cuts through a green, rocky hillside. In the background, a massive, rugged mountain peak rises, its slopes covered in patches of green grass and rocky terrain. The sky is clear and blue.

*These iconic red cars
chug up the mountain
through hand-
dynamited tunnels
and past ibexes*

asked her to approve the wine bottle. "You choose them by looks, but the inside is more important"), we watched paragliders jump off the cliff, their rainbow sails improbably buoying them on the skyline, to the soundtrack of lederhosen-wearing old-timers playing alpenhorns while tourists posed next to them for photos. Talk about good, clean, wholesome fun. It was an aerial, aural confluence of past and present, historic and modern. It was a perfect metaphor for Lucerne.

Richter kindly offered to drive me back to town in her convertible. The road wound along the lakeshore, past swimming holes and the Richard Wagner Museum, the manor on a bluff where the composer created *The Ring Cycle*. *Tristan und Isolde*, however, was written during Wagner's days living in the city's grande dame, the Hotel Schweizerhof. This stately, 170-year-old property with its wood-paneled antique elevator, covetable alfresco seating just off the sidewalk and away from the hoi polloi—an old-world it spot if ever there was one—looks across the neck of the lake at the resolutely contemporary Luzern Culture and Congress Centre, under whose dramatic apron roof lives a concert hall, a gallery, restaurants, bars and a vast waterside patio—the very embodiment of today's conception of public space.

The contradictions continue. Cobblestones and Cubism (do not miss the Museum Sammlung Rosengart, brimming with Picassos, including several in a glorious sunlit center room). The Lion Monument, dedicated in memory of the nearly 1,000 Swiss Guards who died defending Louis XIV's palace during the French Revolution, now trafficked by Asian visitors who



believe in the king of the jungle's mythic powers of protection, strength and prestige. And, in this country known for precision timing, the town is lorded over by the Zyt Tower Clock, hand-wound by an official timekeeper since 1535 to chime the hour one minute in advance, and before all the other clocks in the city.

If that seems a little bit cuckoo, reserve judgment. It's simply the loudest reminder of all the ways in which this lake region maintains its old traditions while molding itself to the new world. It's quaint and quirky, and everything I was looking for in Lucerne. ♦

Lucerne is a great city for a stroll. Opposite: The steep train ride up to Mount Pilatus.

T+L Guide

STAY

Hotel Schweizerhof Luzern

Schweizerhofquai; 41-41/410-0410; schweizerhof-luzern.ch; doubles from CHF302.

Hotel des Balances Weinmarkt;

41-41/418-2828; balances.ch; doubles from CHF220.

Hotel Montana

Adligenswilerstrasse 22; 41-41/419-0000; hotel-montana.ch; doubles from CHF245.

Hotel Pilatus-Kulm Pilatus-

Bahnen AG, Schlossweg 1, Kriens; 41-41/329-1111; pilatus.ch; doubles from CHF390 including four-course dinner and breakfast.

EAT

Restaurant Lapin Musegg strasse 2; 41-41/418-8000;

de-la-paix.ch; dinner for two CHF100.

Stadtkeller Swiss Folklore Restaurant

Sternenplatz 3; 41-41/410-4733; stadtkeller.ch; three- or four-course dinners including Swiss folklore show from CHF72.

Spycher Fondue House

Eisengasse 15; 41-41/412-3737; fondue-house.ch; all-you-can-eat cheese fondue from 49.50 per person.

Scala

Adligenswilerstrasse 22; 41-41/417-3541; hotel-montana.ch; dinner for two CHF160.

Restaurant RED KKL

Convention Center, Europaplatz 1; 41-41/226-7110; kkl-luzern.ch; tasting menus from CHF120 for seven courses.

SEE + DO

Mount Rigi

Two cogwheel railways and seven cableways from Kussnacht, Weggis, Vitznau, Gersau/Obergshwend, Brunnen and Goldblau. rigi.ch

Mount Pilatus

A brand-new cableway joins the cogwheel rail and gondolas as transport options; there's also a toboggan run, ropes course, playground, two hotels, four restaurants and innumerable hiking trails. pilatus.ch

Victorinox Visitors Center

Bahnhofstrasse 3, Brunnen; 41-41/825-6020; swissknifevalley.com; admission free, build your own knife CHF30.

Museum Sammlung Rosengart

Pilatusstrasse 10; pilatus.ch; admission CHF18.

rosengart.ch; adult admission CHF18.

Richard Wagner Museum

Richard Wagner Weg 27, Tribschen; 41-41/360-2370; richard-wagner-museum.ch

Swiss Museum of Transport

Lidostrasse 5; 41-41/370-4444; verkehrshaus.ch; adult admission CHF30, with additional costs for planetarium, Chocolate Adventure and film showings.

Boat cruises on Lake Lucerne

Board restored paddle steamers, the panoramic Saphir yacht and a fleet of other vessels for sightseeing tours, dinner cruises or scenic transport to the towns and mountains dotting the lake. lakelucerne.ch; fares from Lucerne start at CHF16.40.

The laid-back life
at the top of a run.

Opposite: An
après-ski scene
with a view.



LET IT SNOW



Set off on a course of winter sports in the country that does them best. In Switzerland, there's a winter sport for everyone. **ADAM H. GRAHAM** highlights where to find the best skiing, snowboarding, winter hiking, dog sledding and even downhill biking.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY LAURYN ISHAK



ZERMATT

Hands down the most popular mountain resort in Switzerland, car-free Zermatt is located at the base of the iconic 4,478-meter-high Matterhorn whose north face and hooked massif covered in snow is framed by an implausibly blue alpine sky. The best way to experience it is to slalom down its slopes. Because of this, Zermatt is crammed full of winter sports amenities and teems with tourists shopping on its picturesque main thoroughfare. This sometimes translates to crowded slopes.

Fortunately, this is Switzerland where efficiency is king and most gridlock is avoided by a system of 63 mountain railways capable of moving 50,000 skiers per hour. There are also 73 lifts that lead to 360 kilometers of well-groomed pistes in three ski areas all linked by cable-cars and catwalk slopes: the Sunnegga-Rothorn, Gornergrat-Stockhorn, Schwarzsee and Matterhorn Glacier Paradise. If that weren't enough, visitors can ski to Italy's Breuil-Cervinia (via the Theodulpass) for a pizza lunch and come back to Switzerland via cable-car for a fondue supper.

But there's more to Zermatt than skiing and the Matterhorn. Freeriders and freestylers come for the Swatch Skiers Cup (swatchskierscup.com) and Gravity Park, known for its challenging pipes, kickers and rails. There's also

curling, winter paragliding, off-piste heli-skiing, snow hikes and toboggan runs. This year, Zermatt celebrates two milestones: the 150th anniversary of Alpinist Edward Whymper's ascent of the Matterhorn and its 200th birthday with a series of events, including a choreographed bonfire lightshow performed atop 26 different summits and a new self-sufficient hotel cube that will move to 52 sites throughout 2015. zermatt.ch/en/150; zermatt.ch/en/Skiing; daily lift pass from CHF79.

APRÈS-SKI: The 30-room Cervo (cervo.ch; *four-night packages for two from CHF2,500*) offers some of the best Matterhorn views around. Its plaid wallpaper and modernist mountain décor provides an ideal hideaway for design-minded skiers. Cervo's wellness facilities include private chalets with hot tubs, while homemade massage oils come from botanicals grown in their own organic garden. After a few runs, kick off your skis at Les Marmottes (les-marmottes.ch; *doubles from CHF250*), a cozy wood-lined stubli perched just above the Furi gondola. It specializes in wild game dishes like venison in thyme

confit or chamois in cowberry sauce. Keep your body warm well into the night with a nightcap at Hexen Bar (grampis.ch; *open until 2 a.m.*) on the village's main strip and known for its extensive selection of *glühwein*, whiskeys, and spiked teas and coffees.

SAAS-FEE

Like Zermatt, Saas-Fee is another winter resort town that forbids cars and boasts a plethora of winter sports options, but is decidedly less touristy and generally offers skiers a bit more maneuvering room on the slopes. Through the 1980's and 1990's, Saas-Fee was a favorite of Swiss families with excellent but limited skiing. But it has begun to lure boarders and extreme winter sports enthusiasts who come for tobogganing, ice climbing and a death-defying glacial downhill bike competition. Today, the gorgeous and isolated Saas Valley is home to 22 lifts and more than 150 kilometers of downhill pistes. Saas-Fee's Spielboden ski area is the centerpiece of this network and is accessible by the world's highest metro train, Metro Alpin, which bores



From far left:
The imposing
Matterhorn; the
Gstaad Palace
hotel; nowhere
to go but
downhill and
fast; straight to
the top.



Saas Fee has begun to lure boarders and extreme winter sports enthusiasts who come for ice climbing and an death-defying glacial downhill bike competition

directly through the mountain. Above it are a few more piste networks, including two highlights: Längfluh Glacier and Kreuzboden-Hochsaas. The Längfluh Glacier opened to skiing in 1984 and remains a favorite of snowboarders looking to carve fresh powder in the slippery shadow of the mighty Mischabel Massif. The 2,869-meter-high perch is also home to the world's highest revolving restaurant and a subterranean Ice Pavilion (saas-fee.ch/bergbahnen), where visitors can explore a warren of frosty tunnels and cerulean ice grottoes that double as galleries for geology exhibits explaining—sometimes in painfully erudite detail—the history of the ancient glacier. Kreuzboden-Hochsaas is

perched high above Saas-Grund on the opposite side of the valley and home to 20 kilometers of winter walking trails, eight kilometers of cross-country ski trails and various other winter sports draws, like an illuminated 11-kilometer-long Toboggan run with a thrilling 55-degree incline that stretches from Kreuzboden to Saas-Grund. *saas-fee.ch; daily lift pass from CHF59.*

APRÈS-SKI: Waldhotel Fletschhorn (fletschhorn.ch; doubles from CHF350) is a cozy inn at the end of a woodsy lane just a 25-minute walk from the center of Saas-Fee village. Its 12 modern, sunlit rooms are bathed in natural wood and white textiles. Saas-Fee has seen a huge upgrade of food quality in

the last five years, but Fletschhorn's excellent Michelin-starred Restaurant and Vinotek Fletschhorn, manned by Chef Markus Neff, remains one of the best. It dishes out hearty mountain fare like roasted Alpine lamb chops, truffle "Wellington" poached in white Marsanne, and oven baked winter apple on vanilla-bean sable and peppered caramel ice-cream. Its wine cellars contain 45,000 bottles, many of them local from the canton of Valais and available by the glass.

GSTAAD

Gstaad is the epitome of power powder. The quaint but moneyed ski resort has all the charm of an alpine village—think weathered barns and fondue-steamed stubli ceilings—with a whopping dollop of glamour: cozy chalets converted to Ralph Lauren and Cartier shops. It also has a decidedly French flair, despite being located on the German-speaking side of Switzerland's *röstigraben*, the invisible line that separates Switzerland's German and French sides.

Nationalities and languages aside, Gstaad's has a long docket of celebrity visitors. Most recently it's seen notables like Anne Hathaway and Kofi Annan, while Madonna—rumored to have bought a chalet here in 2014—has been a fixture on Gstaad's slopes.

Fortunately for winter sports enthusiasts, Gstaad delivers excellent skiing terrain and the massive resort is as expansive as it is expensive. Gstaad-Saanenland boasts 220 kilometers of pistes at up to 3,000 meters. There are 57 lifts that span a wide 19-kilometer swath of majestic Bernese Oberland alpine terrain from Zweisimmen in the east to Château-d'Oex in the west and another 32 kilometers to the Diablerets Glacier. Away from the skis, there are 200 kilometers of dedicated winter walking trails that only require a pair of boots. Popular with locals, they lead you on quiet strolls past frozen waterfalls and snow-dusted pine boughs that make a great diversion from flashy Gstaad.

Atop it all is Glacier 3000 (glacier3000.ch), a sometimes rowdy snow park with toboggan runs, a dog-sledding run, romantic winter sleigh rides and a well-equipped, upgraded Snowpark, beloved by freestylers and professional riders. gstaad.ch; *daily lift pass from CHF66*.

APRÈS-SKI: The 104-room Gstaad Palace (palace.ch; *doubles from CHF592*) is housed in a Gilded-Age palace that looms over the tiny village like a big out-of-place chess rook. Rooms, which come in 13 categories, feature wood-paneled ceilings, plaid loungers, and oversized terraces that offer inspiring views of the toothy 1,800-meter high Wasserngrat. The staff at the 6,000-square-meter spa are ready to coddle you with a bevy of treatments including papaya scrubs, hammam steams and Sisley and Cinq Monde facials. But this is no stuffy, grande dame hotel. It is Switzerland's definitive party palace, home to the infamous Green Go Bar (greengo.ch) a

swank lounge with its own sprawling indoor pool and a retro 70's-era vibe that recalls design elements from Studio 54 replete with A-list guests. Be sure to book your table at Die Chesery (chesery.ch; *five-course menu CHF165 per person*), an elegant chalet that's become the Gstaad go-to for creative fare and often fills up fast. Dishes include wild duck with green lentils, cheese ravioli with chiroille mushrooms and lobster cappuccino.

ST. MORITZ

St. Moritz is located in the heart of Switzerland's Romansch-speaking region and like Gstaad, gets its fair share of snow queens and celebrities. Historically, its celebrity culture has

If you can, arrive in St. Moritz from the south via the roller coaster 19th-century Bernina Express, one of only five railways with UNESCO World Heritage status

veered to the more literary and cultural. Repeat visitors like Hermann Hesse, Thomas Mann, Rilke, Nietzsche, Wagner, Toscanini and Strauss helped make St. Moritz the chic go-to for German speakers that it continues to be today, alongside moneyed Americans, Russians, English, Indians and Italians. But most eyes here in the majestic Engadin Valley are fixed on the twinkling and crystalline Alpine light, for which it is known, not the stars who frequent it. Because much of St. Moritz is also on the same sunnier, steeper side of the Alps as Italy, it's an easy drive from Milan. The valley sees plenty of blue-sky days, which are best enjoyed from its well-known peaks like Piz Bernina, Piz Palü, Corvatsch, Corviglia and Diavolezza.

If you can, arrive from the south via the roller-coaster 19th-century Bernina Express train (sbb.ch; *tickets from CHF19*), one of only five railways in the world that's been given UNESCO World Heritage status. The train starts in Tirano, Italy before chugging up above the tree line before plunging down cavernous mountain tunnels and over ancient azure glaciers and

19th-century viaducts, all in a feat of spectacular Swiss Alpine engineering that's as exciting as any mountain run. Just outside St. Moritz is an exceptional winter wonderland with—take a deep breath—horse-drawn sleighs circling a lakeside promenade, an ice-skating rink, 350 kilometers of piste, the steepest start slope in Switzerland (the Piz Nair Wall with its 100 percent vertiginous drop), 150 kilometers of winter walking trails, a 200-kilometer network of woodsy cross-country ski trails, and a half-pipe for snowboarders. It may not have the cozy quaintness of the other stops, but there's a reason St. Moritz lures the

glitterati and twice hosted the Winter Olympics (in 1928 and 1948, in case anyone asks): the Engadin Valley is breathtaking. Nearby are rustic Alpine barns, and 9th-century Carolingian chapels decorated with colorful hand-painted Sgraffito—a sort of ancient Alpine graffiti.

APRÈS-SKI:

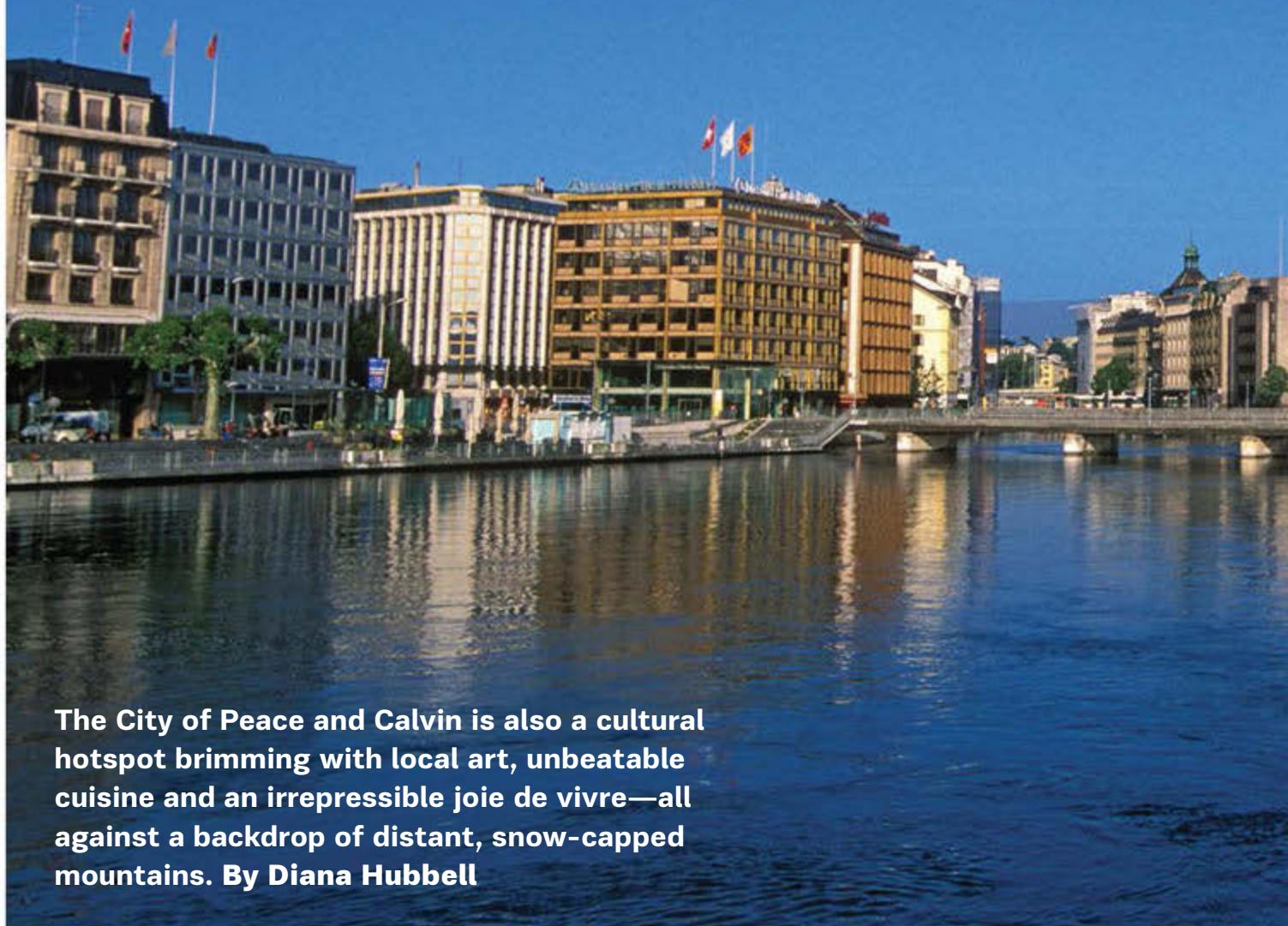
Badrutt's Palace (badruttspalace.com; *doubles from CHF935*) is one of the swankiest hotels in Europe with all the trimmings of a typical Swiss Palace hotel including a grand hall, oversized fireplaces, marble tubs, an opulent spa, and even a few modern extras like 2014's new Nobu restaurant to prove its mettle with the cosmopolitan jetset. For something easier on the pocketbook, try the ski-in, ski-out, Nira Alpina (niraalpina.com; *three-night packages from CHF440 for two*), home to an especially modern spa and sauna complex. It's five kilometers from glitzy St. Moritz and its 70 rooms feature soft down-topped beds, spruce paneling and striking views of Lake Silvaplana. Its affordable restaurant is one of Switzerland's best hotel eateries: think house-smoked ribs with malden pepper sauce and tandoori prawns. Breakfast, with sharp alpine cheeses, homemade fruit preserves, and local honeys, is a hit. (stmoritz.ch; *day pass from CHF46*). 



Snowboarding
solo in the
Swiss Alps.

Our Definitive Guide to

Geneva



The City of Peace and Calvin is also a cultural hotspot brimming with local art, unbeatable cuisine and an irrepressible *joie de vivre*—all against a backdrop of distant, snow-capped mountains. By Diana Hubbell

A large Swiss flag is flying prominently in the upper right corner of the image. The flag is red with a white cross in the center, and the white cross has a smaller red cross in the middle. Below the flag, the calm surface of a lake reflects the surrounding buildings and trees. In the background, a row of multi-story buildings, likely in Geneva, are visible along the water's edge. The sky is a clear, bright blue.

Lakeside in Geneva.

PEROUSSE BRUNO/HEMIS.FR/GETTY IMAGES



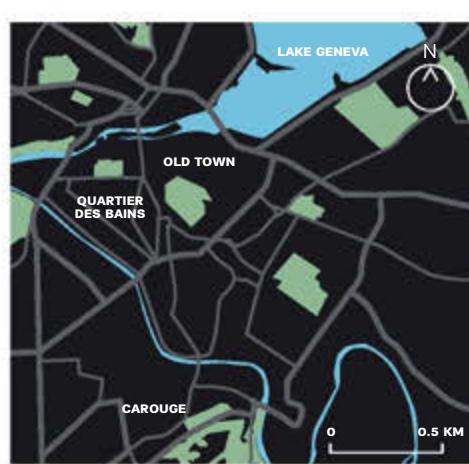
STAY

SHOP

SEE+DO

EAT

LOCAL TAKE



Lay of the Land

Old City Winding cobblestone streets and beautifully preserved architecture make up the thriving core of the town.

The Right Bank The newer section of the city and home to the United Nations complex, as well as most of the luxury hotels.

Quartier des Bains The epicenter of the city's creative movement where hipsters gather to check out the latest art installations, then chat about them over cocktails.

Carouge A laid-back neighborhood a short stroll from the city center rife with galleries, sidewalk cafés and boutique shops.



Stay

Geneva's design-oriented hotels and some grand classics.

HOTEL N'VY

This design darling owes much of its striking style to artist-in-residence Triny Prada and street graffiti master Meres One, whose murals decorate the downstairs lobby. Bold furnishings add to the aesthetic. hotelnvygeneva.com; doubles from CHF180.

FOUR SEASONS HOTEL DES BERGUES

Though this grande dame has graced the Right Bank since 1834, it feels fresh thanks to a 2009 overhaul. Much of the old Belle Epoque style endures, though it's now complemented by modern luxuries, including a 1,200-square-meter rooftop spa with a dazzling panorama of the Alps. fourseasons.com; doubles from CHF700.

SWISSOTEL METROPOLE GENEVA

Slickly designed and still shining from a complete refurbishment

finished in 2014, the only five-star on the Left Bank offers easy access to the city's compact central shopping and business districts. All of the 127 rooms and suites offer amenities such as an extensive pillow menu and local Favarger chocolates, while the upper-tier options include extras such as a personal hammam shower or Jacuzzi. swissotel.com; doubles from CHF510.

GRAND HOTEL KEMPINSKI GENEVA

The view of Geneva's famous Jet d'Eau's 140-meter water plume from the glass-encased FloorTwo Lounge at this A-List favorite, which is nothing short of spectacular. It's also home to the city's largest indoor pool, a sprawling spa, three restaurants and an always-boisterous nightclub. kempinski.com; doubles from CHF460.

HOTEL EDELWEISS GENEVA

If you can't make it out to the slopes of Verbier, this inner-city chalet might just be the next best thing. Cute but never kitsch, the 42 rooms are done in fragrant pine wood while the restaurant features Swiss dishes made with local ingredients. hoteledelweissgeneva.com; doubles from CHF153.

MANDARIN ORIENTAL GENEVA

From the Michelin-starred Indian restaurant Rasoi to Café Calla with more than 1,500 different wines in its cellar, this elegant number offers plenty of places to meet and mingle. Sophisticated rooms and suites sport plush amenities such as high-definition TVs, goose down bedding and iPod entertainment systems. mandarinoriental.com; doubles from CHF595.

Shop

Five local links to modern shopping.

1 L'Adresse (Eaux-Vives)

Lunch on organic dishes at the store's restaurant, then shop for eco-friendly cosmetics and the latest collections from designers such as Diane von Fürstenberg and Isabel Marant Etoile. ladress.ch.



2 Le Bal des Créateurs

This combination shop in the Quartier des Bains houses a full-fledged beauty salon, as well as an exhibition space and range of upscale accessories for purchase. lebaldescreateurs.com.

3 Little Nemo

Kitsch art and comics cover every bit of this charming gallery in Carouge. Pick up a tongue-in-cheek superhero print or an original watercolor book

illustration. Regular artist talks and signings add to the appeal. facebook.com/Little.Nemo. Torino.

4 Theodora

It may be not quite as famed for its perfumes as it is for its watches, but Geneva is a city that knows its scents. Track down rare fragrances as this elegant parfumerie. parfumerietheodora.ch.

5 Meubles et Cie

A carefully curated, eclectic mix of furnishings makes this design haven a must for anyone with an eye for interior decorating. Established & SONS, Gervasoni 1882 and Moooi are just a few of the labels you'll find here. meubles-cie.ch.



Clockwise from top left: At Le Bal des Creatures; kitschy Little Nemo; eco-friendly L' Adresse.



See+Do

EMBARK ON A CRUISE

There's no better way to take in the sights of this aquatically centered city than on a cruise. Tours of every length imaginable depart almost hourly and pass by the picturesque river banks, the mermaid statue and, of course, the beloved "jeddo," as Genevans affectionately call

Leave time for some local culture, both old and new.

their postcard-favorite fountain. swissboat.com.

TAKE IN THE MUSEUMS

Stroll through the experimental multimedia installations at Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (mamcho.ch); explore the world's humanitarian efforts at the interactive Red

Cross Museum (redcrossmuseum.ch); or delve into the proud history of Swiss watchmaking at the Patek Philippe Museum (patekmuseum.com), which showcases more than a thousand antique timepieces decorated with gold, jewels and hand-painted lacquer.

HUNT FOR TREASURE AT THE MARKETS

Original works of art, antiques and vintage gems are all display at the Saturday morning flea market on the Plaine de Plainpalais. On Sunday, the same space transforms into a foodie frenzy, with stalls hawking everything from Peruvian ceviche to Sicilian seafood salads to entire roasted suckling pigs. Wednesday and Saturday mornings bring a similar wealth of gourmet goodies to the Place du Marche in lovely, leafy Carouge.

ROOFTOP VIEWING

Haul your camera up to the north tower in Cathédrale St.-Pierre to take in the rooftops of Calvin's

city. If you've got a little extra time, hop a cable car or hike the winding paths to the top of Mont-Salève, just minutes from the city center, for a heart-stopping panoramic vista.

GEEK OUT

CERN, a complex housing the mammoth LHC particle accelerator that just celebrated its 60th anniversary, is so popular that tours are often booked out weeks in advance. Contemplate the mysteries of life, the universe and everything as you wander through the 27 kilometers of subterranean tunnels. home.web.cern.ch.

GO FOR A WALK IN A NEARBY PARK

It's almost impossible not to stop and linger by the giant chess boards in the shady Parc des Bastions. Dive into a leisurely game or order an espresso at the stunningly restored Le Café Restaurant du Parc des Bastions and watch the day go by through the giant floor-to-ceiling windows.



Clockwise from left: Popular diplomat lunch spot Cottage Café; Le Thermomètre and Restaurant Les Armures.



Eat

When in Geneva, dine like the locals.

LE THERMOMETRE

You may have to claw your way inside this popular lunchtime spot, but the generous portions of classics such as salmon tartar and steak with rich potatoes *dauphinoise* are worth the wait. Rue Neuve-du-Molard 22; CHF60.

CAFE PAPON

Tucked away in an atmospheric nook in Geneva's old town, the café's braised lamb shank melts with the gentle tug of a fork and the classic *soupe de poisson* is richly aromatic and redolent of the sea. Expect friendly service and smartly updated classics. cafe-papon.com; CHF100.

BRASSERIE LIPP

From the butter-bathed escargot to the North African-inflected seafood couscous perfumed with saffron, everything is spot-on. brasserie-lipp.com; CHF140.

COTTAGE CAFE

This fairytale wooden cottage is a little piece of the countryside in the Right Bank. A concise menu of rotating lunch specials—try the quinoa salad—offers light bites and a chance to kick back. cottagecafe.ch; lunch for two CHF60.

RESTAURANT LES ARMURES

Boasting what many consider to be the best fondue in town, this gem in a refurbished 17th-century boutique hotel shouldn't be missed. The signature dish gets its unctuous creaminess from a blend of Vacherin and Gruyère cheeses, plus a little extra oomph from a healthy slug of Cognac. Don't forget to try the seasonal specials, such as the fig carpaccio with buffalo mozzarella, toasted hazelnuts and artisanally cured ham. hotel-les-armures.ch; CHF100.

CAFE DU CENTRE

The Moët flows fast and freely at this decadent brunch spot, where the Benedicts are good and the people-watching even better. Book a table outside and order a round of crisp potato rösti or go all out and with plates of oysters and whole grilled lobsters. cafeducentre.ch; brunch for two CHF60.

CAFE DU MARCHE

On a sun-drenched square in Carouge, this bistro serves a short, daily menu with a welcome side of charm. Come on a Saturday, when the local food market outside is in full swing, order a perfect café au lait and soak in the ambience. cafe-du-marche.ch; CHF90.

Restaurant prices represent approximate cost for dinner for two, unless otherwise noted.

Drink

Le Verre A Monique

This speakeasy-style joint in the artsy Quartier des Bains is where mixologists and cocktail connoisseurs go for potent elixirs. verreamonique.ch.

Le Bateau-Lavoir

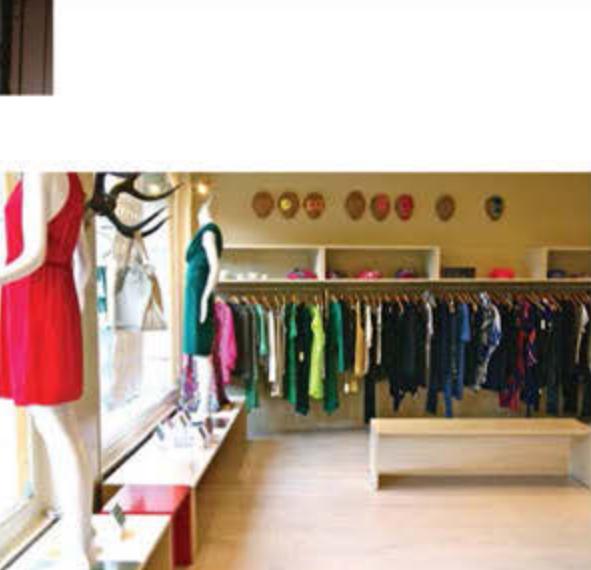
Once an old laundry-washing boat, this barge has been transformed into a trendy spot for tapas and drinks on the river. bateau-lavoir.ch.

Le Rouge et le Blanc

At this classic wine bar on the banks of the Rhône, the duck foie gras, Brie and tapas are all made in-house from scratch. lerougeblanc.ch.

Rooftop 42

"Cocktails with a view" is an understatement at this sleek, eight-story spot where pretty young things go to preen and sip lychee-infused saketinis. Come in the evening or spend the whole Sunday at one of the city's most over-the-top brunch spreads. rooftop42.com.



Clockwise from far left:
Le Flacon;
Septieme Etage; the
comfortable Le
Café de la Paix.



Local Take

Three insiders share their favorite places in Geneva.



**ADRIANO
VENTURINI**
Chef at Swissotel
Metropole Geneva



PHILLIP CRAMER
Designer



VINCENT DEBERGE
Sommelier at
Hôtel Beau Rivage
Genève

The chef at **Le Flacon** (leflacon.ch; dinner for two CHF80) is a friend of mine. The restaurant recently picked up a Michelin star, but is still reasonably priced for the quality of the food. **Le Trois Verres** (lestroisverres.ch; dinner for two CHF140) is very different from other Italian places. I think that this is the most interesting restaurant in Geneva right now. **Le Chat Noir** (chatnoir.ch; drinks for two CHF30) has tapas and cocktails in an artsy area. Finally, **5** (swissotel.com; drinks for two CHF40) bar is one of the best in town. It has an amazing terrace overlooking the city.

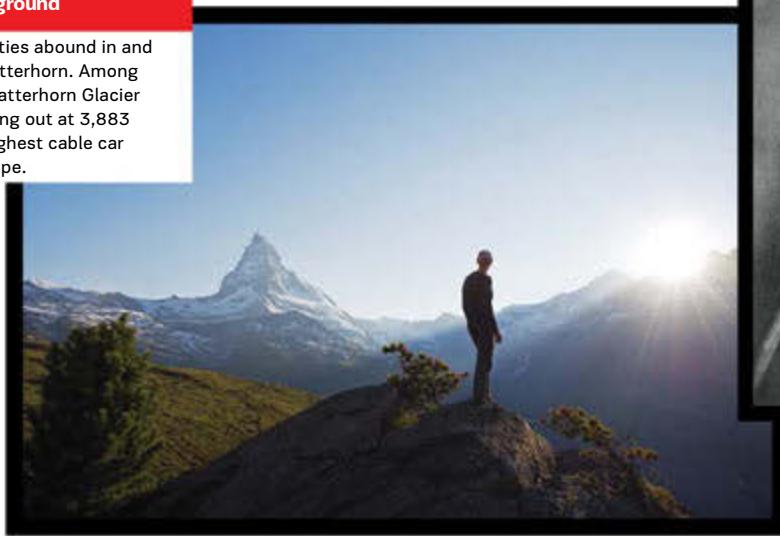
Luigia (luigia.ch; dinner for two CHF110) is a buzzing pizzeria with a twist. A plus is that it's super central, so there's no need to drive after all of the vino rosso. **Auberge du Cheval Blanc** (cheval-blanc-du-carre.com; dinner for two CHF120) is for summer only. It's a bit far from the center, but it's worth it. When you are seated in the garden, surrounded by vineyards, you are on vacation as long as your dinner lasts. **Tschin Ta Ni** (tschin-ta-ni.ch) is a funny little shop that sells all kinds of Chinese tea. It really belongs in a Woody Allen movie. **Septieme Etage** (septieme.com) is the best place to get dolled up.

For its size, Geneva offers a surprising number of restaurants and bars. For a nice meal, go to **Le Café de la Paix** (cafe-de-la-paix.ch; dinner for two CHF120), the new eatery of Sylvain Le Bouhec, formerly owner of L'Artichaut. Same food, but larger premises. For a delicious hamburger in a lively environment try **Inglewood** (inglewood.ch; dinner for two CHF50), not far from the Jet d'Eau. Those looking for a more gastronomic experience should head to **La Réunion** (restaurant-reunion.ch; dinner for two CHF200) in the village of Veyrier. It's about 10 minutes from downtown and at the foot of the Salève mountain.

The Matterhorn

Modern playground

Outdoor activities abound in and around the Matterhorn. Among these is the Matterhorn Glacier Express, topping out at 3,883 meters, the highest cable car station in Europe.



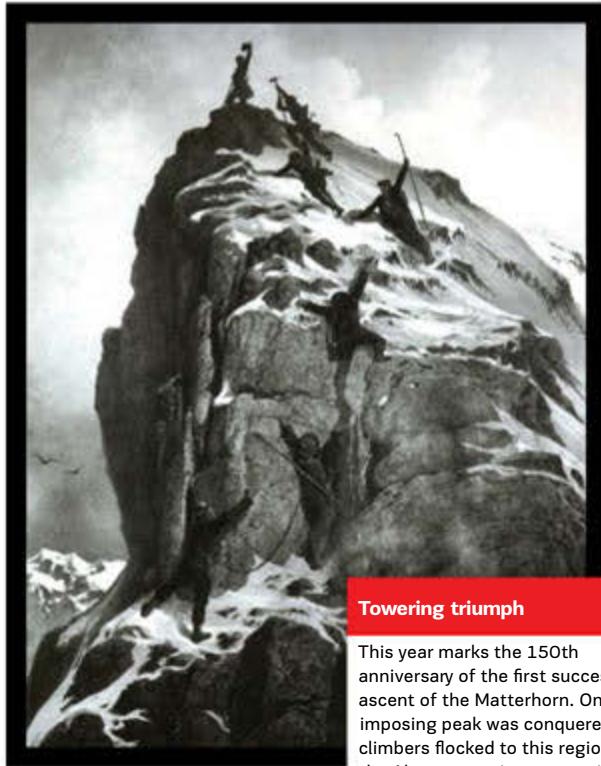
First to the top

English mountaineer Edward Whymper was the first to ascend the Matterhorn, on his eighth attempt. Until the successful climb, he was convinced its precipitous appearance was an optical illusion.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: CHRISTIAN KOBER/GETTY IMAGES; ZERMATT TOURISM; LIVIO SINIBALDI/GETTY IMAGES; ZERMATT TOURISM

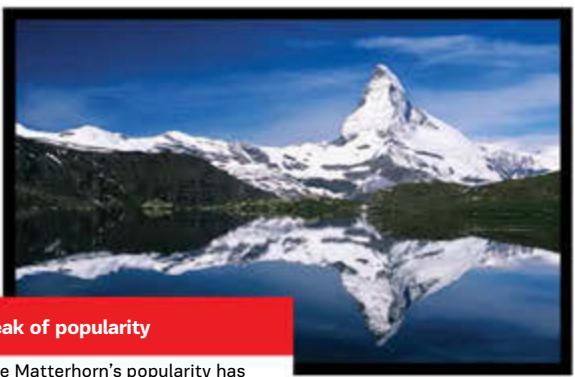
Towering triumph

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the first successful ascent of the Matterhorn. Once the imposing peak was conquered, climbers flocked to this region of the Alps, prompting a surge in tourism that continues to this day.



Peak of popularity

The Matterhorn's popularity has never been stronger and this year's celebrations center on the reopening of the Hornli hut, a key part of the climbing puzzle, in July. For more details, visit www.zermatt.ch/en/150





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